

DESIGNING AND SELLING RECYCLED FASHION: ACCEPTANCE OF UPCYCLED  
SECONDHAND CLOTHES BY FEMALE CONSUMERS, AGE 25 TO 65

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Title

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**MASTER OF SCIENCE**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Fast fashion offers low prices and lots of choices with the opportunity to binge on fashion. Wardrobes are overflowing, and consumers are considering the options for disposal and recycling of their clothes. Upcycling is one way for designers and manufacturers to recycle textiles wherein secondhand fashion is deconstructed and reconstructed into current fashion.

Twenty women, ages 25-65, were asked how they recycle their discarded clothing and whether they would be open to buying secondhand clothes if they were upcycled into garments that reflect current trends. Women reported that style and price were more important than environmental causes in their upcycled purchases. Purchase motivators included knowing the genealogy of secondhand textiles and the artistic treatment of upcycled clothes. Barriers to upcycled fashion purchases included concerns about sanitation and an increase in price over comparable garments. Designers, manufacturers, and retailers can use the results to design, market, and sell upcycled fashion.

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# INTRODUCTION

The word “upcycle” was added to the *Concise Oxford English Dictionary* in 2011 along with other fashion related terms such as “jeggings” and “mankini” (Ngack, 2011). The word upcycling and its antonym downcycling derive their meaning from variations of recycling which is commonly associated with reducing our waste and reusing everything we discard. The same dictionary defines upcycling as the reuse of discarded items in order to create a product of higher value than the original (2011). This could mean that a dress pieced together from deconstructed thrift store clothes and made into current fashions would be “upcycled”. These dresses may be designed by a designer, use unique combination of secondhand textiles, and may start their second life to be sold to consumers at comparable or even higher prices than other dresses.

There are three steps that are illustrated in a wheel or circle that represent the process of reusing textile products: (Fig. 1) the first is to collect, the second is to reprocess, and the third is to resell to consumers. Designers and manufacturers could take products that have been sold once and reprocess them into something even more valuable so that retailers can resell it the second time at a higher price and upcycle it. This process allows recycling to add value and profit. The upcycling process illustrated in Figure 2, looks a bit different as we sort, reconstruct and add value.

In the fashion world the trend of fast fashion is quickly providing a volume of textiles that are easily recyclable in a number of ways. The textiles can be shredded and reformed into new garments, they can be used as paper pulp, insulation, and discarded textiles can have a variety of industrial uses including stuffing and rags, or the garments themselves can be deconstructed and reconstructed into new garments. These processes save them from the incinerator and the landfill where the only redeeming value is that they may be burned for steam. Products that have been recycled and remade into new products need to be purchased in order for the whole cause of saving resources to make

sense. Once the garments are resold to consumers in Figure 1, we say that the loop has closed and in fact can begin again. How can women be propelled to close the recycling loop by buying upcycled fashion?

This study is designed to focus on the deconstruction and reconstruction of fashion into wearable garments in terms of consumer design preferences, consumer perspective on value, and consumer decisions to purchase upcycled fashion goods. Will consumers, in this case, females ages 25-65, wear secondhand recycled garments and in what form? What will make them excited about wearing secondhand clothes that have been upcycled in some way? How can these women be propelled to close the recycling loop by buying upcycled fashion? What do designers and retailers need to do to tempt shoppers to purchase? The designs with upcycled clothing are just beginning to appear in the marketplace. What are the consumer barriers to making a purchase of upcycled clothing? If consumers don't consider any form of recycled or upcycled clothes as wearable or purchasable, then recycling textiles in this way doesn't have a chance, regardless of how noble the cause is and the effort that is made. We are in the initial stages of this type of product development, which is indicative of a primarily qualitative study to help identify emerging thoughts and ideas.



Figure 1. Upcycling Process



## Upcycling

McDonough and Braungart, the fathers of descriptive recycling, give a very broad definition stating that upcycling is “optimizing the materials, ingredients, and process pathways in such a way that waste is converted to raw materials for nature or some other industry” (2013). In popular culture, especially in the realm of product design and fashion, those materials are optimized for greater value to the consumer. In the book, *Shaping Sustainable Fashion*, upcycling is defined through the eyes of the designer who can determine the real value of discarded materials through their transformation in design and manufacturing (Gwilt & Rissanen, 2011). *Upcycle Magazine* is more practical with their definition through the eyes of the consumer when they define upcycling as giving new life to things that consumers discard (2009). Some, according to *Upcycle Magazine* believe the definition lies in the process; that recycling is chemical and upcycling is physical. The manufacturing definition is given by Terracycle, a company that makes products from pre and post consumer waste. They say upcycling is taking waste material from a state as close to the original as possible to avoid dramatic reprocessing and making products that are of better quality or have greater environmental value (Eek, 2012). In this study, the definition of upcycling refers to the process of reusing clothing offering, pre- or post-consumer textiles new life by redesigning them into current fashion.

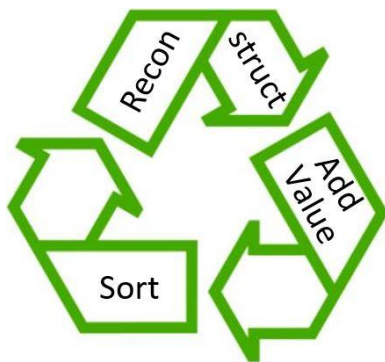


Figure 2. Process of Re-using Textile Products

No matter whose eyes we see recycling through, the cast-offs are saved from the incinerator or landfill and become of value to society again. In some cases, used textile like denim has been used as insulation, or used textiles have been converted to rags for use in many industries. In the eyes of a visionary designer, textile waste has the potential to be of great value, possibly even greater than its original form. This resurrection falls under the umbrella of ethical fashion and products. Ethical fashion includes other sustainable ideas, including Fair Trade, organic, recycling (upcycling included), the practices of using animal resources wisely, and the high principled activities of a company when it comes to their resources (Minney, 2011); e.g. sweatshops. Minney (2011) specifically addresses sustainable fashion ideas and upcycling when she writes about “reclaiming fabrics from second hand or end roll” (p. 162). There are many opportunities for sustainability in the fashion industry. The word upcycling has been used during the last two decades in many industries, but the word is trying to find its place in the fashion industry.

In a preliminary study done as part of the Consumer Behavior course offered by Oklahoma State University, I posed some questions to five women on the topic of upcycling as part of an assignment. I learned that some women were concerned with the sanitation of garments that had been reused. Some women were concerned with quality and whether name brand items had been used in the upcycling. It was discovered that they would not know the brand names that might have been used as new garments were pieced from old ones because none of the previous labels would be present. There were concerns with quality and how long the garment would last if it had already been worn by someone else even though it had been deconstructed and reconstructed. The genealogy of the textiles and the garment seemed to be important, and recycled clothes seemed to have vague labels.

Garments that are upcycled can be constructed in a number of ways. They may be made entirely from secondhand clothing that has been culled from a thrift store. They may be a mix of part

brand-new material and part recycled clothing. They might be made from pre-consumer materials that were left on the factory floor. Or they might be a mix of pre-consumer waste and post-consumer materials. Any combination is possible. Some companies have their own programs to reuse their leftovers; Patagonia's Common Threads or American Apparel's Creative Reuse line reuse their leftovers, and designer Stella McCartney has her own textile recycling program in London.

The designs in the marketplace today seem to be in an experimentation phase because it is not clear what consumers want or expect. The mainstream designers typically call upcycled fashion "vintage" fashion, and they usually use vintage pre- or post-consumer textiles in accessories rather than on garments, possibly because they can't vouch for quality. Other less known designers market themselves as "designers with a cause" and use terms like eco-conscious design as they use recycled textiles in any of the above-mentioned ways. The styling options range anywhere from indie styles reminiscent of the 60s and 70s where garments were often pieced to give a bohemian look, to high-end current fashion styles that appear more like art, and the price tag reflects the artistic aesthetics of the garment.

One of the design ideas inherent in most upcycled clothing is the idea that they are usually one-of-a-kind. Those fashion innovators or groups that already enjoy that "one and only" look include those that embrace the indie fashion philosophy. The style or fashion philosophy named "indie" is listed as formal language in the *Merriam Webster Dictionary* where it was first defined as a shortened word for independent in 1928 (n.d.). Originally, the term was used to describe films and music that were on the subculture side, with artists creating their own style without corporate approval or funding, but today, the term has evolved. Indie is used to describe almost anything in the culture that is creative or different, is all about satisfying yourself and who you are, and it appeals to the Millennial generational group in particular (Andrews, 2006). The philosophy as it relates to fashion is about those who dress according to their own style and not the trickle-down trends.

Upycled garments can have that independent appeal. No matter who the designer is or what styling options designers choose, these upcycled fashion garments and accessories are by nature one-of-a-kind. Older generational groups may find that same one and only appeal as they are familiar with exclusivity and custom clothing, including tailored goods. There is some familiarity with upcycled fashion concepts across the board, but the vintage, bohemian styles of the past will not necessarily find the same appeal in consumer groups who want currency in their apparel. This is a new twist because upcycling textiles is really fashion design with a cause, and it has yet to find its market.

## **Background**

I became interested in this topic about a decade ago. My family and I became victims of a contamination incident in our home. We were remodeling our home, and our whole family became ill. My children could no longer walk, and they had a unique mix of about 20 symptoms, including rashes, migraines, fevers, throats so sore their tonsils began blocking their airways, and even neurological problems. Mayo Clinic in Rochester, MN, became involved, and their evaluation helped us discover that the remodeler of our home had left sewer pipes disconnected and sewer vents left open. Fumes were pouring into our home carrying bacteria and fumes from the hospital and funeral home up the hill from us. Scientists flew in from all over the country and found that there were eight toxic molds and other unknown bacteria being flushed up into our home from the crawl space. The contractors didn't have enough insurance to even cover our mortgage, much less the rest of the losses. We took our homeowner's insurance all the way to the state Supreme Court with the assistance of the State Attorney General. It was found that contamination is not referred to specifically or covered by the policy in any way. We had to have the house destroyed, go through a decontamination process, and walk away with nothing. We all had damaged health, no home, no possessions, and no money left.

After healthcare, clothing and shelter were a priority. Some clothing donations started coming in and we ended up with a great deal of clothing that was torn or ill-fitting. I borrowed a sewing machine (I apprenticed under a French couturier for about two years in the early 1970's), and my whole family began deconstructing the secondhand clothes and helping to design upcycled clothing for our family. I took a men's pinstripe suit coat and pleated the back to create a cinched waist for me. It was stolen twice (I made a second one, and it was stolen when I went to Washington D.C.). Everyone asked about where we got our clothes, even about our accessories--the lunchboxes the kids made to carry. Here we were in the depths of adversity, and people were stealing our clothes or wanting what we had. Even amidst the tragedy and grief that accompanied this incident, I learned that there is value in the design and the excitement and freshness of the design itself, regardless of whether it comes from secondhand clothes, maybe even more so from recycled clothing because it is one-of-a-kind and affordable.

My background also includes some novel fashion use of pre-consumer materials. In the mid 1970's during my college years, I had my own visual merchandising company, and I offered some public relations services in addition to fashion shows. A mall that contracted my services regularly wanted some publicity and asked me for ideas. This was a time when NASA had just finished the Apollo program from 1963-1972, and we had celebrated the five-year anniversary of the first man on the moon. I contacted NASA to ask for fabrics, leftover pre-consumer fabrics that had been used on the moon mission, so that I could design holiday caftans to use in the fashion show. My assumption was that we would not only obtain local but also national publicity. NASA agreed to send me two fabrics left over from space missions in exchange for some photographs they could use in their own public relations. One of the fabrics was from an early foray into space, a silver mylar type fabric from the ECHO weather balloon. The second piece of fabric was double sided orange and silver and was reinforced fabric for use during the 1969 Apollo moon mission to protect the nose cone from the

over-a-thousand-degree temperatures that the rocket needed to withstand upon re-entry. I designed the caftans for use in the fashion show, and the mall received national attention. There are textiles from all kinds of industries that can be used as fashion textiles, from expired parachutes to leftover bus upholstery. The possibilities for upcycled fashion in terms of textile use, design, and fashion are creative and almost endless.

### **The lifecycle of clothing**

The fashion industry is primed for the entry of upcycled fashion because of the current trend of fast fashion. Fast fashion has offered cheap prices and lots of choices with the opportunity to binge on fashion. Fast fashion labels recognize the value in fresh new designs, and the price makes it available to many, a democratic form of style. There is more emphasis on design in the fast fashion world than people realize. Oddly, fast fashion can become the fodder for upcycled clothes. What can be more democratic about fashion than upcycling? We can create exciting fashion and help save the world at the same time. There is some training, some marketing, and some activism that will be required to make this type of fashion available and desirable. I want to know what barriers exist to the individual shopper and what will propel them and find out if upcycling can become a desirable, even mainstream fashion purchase.

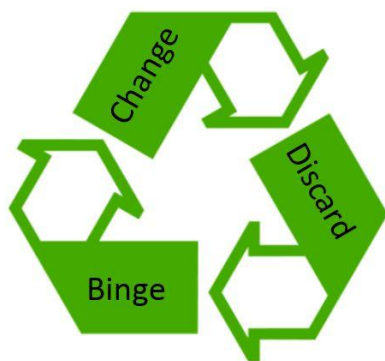


Figure 3. Process of Consumption of Fast Fashion

Wardrobes are overflowing, and consumers are considering the options for disposal of their clothes. The leftover textiles become another source for upcycled designs. Figure 3 shows the process of consumption of fast fashion illustrated in a wheel and it shows how textiles are made available for upcycling right in the consumer's homes. From bingeing, to changing out clothing pieces and replacing them with current trends on a fast- fashion cycle, to discarding those clothes to thrift stores, consignment shops, friends, yard sales, or Craigslist, there are many ways consumers choose to buy and discard their clothing. Those closet textiles may travel to a few sources before becoming upcycled as people buy and re-donate to thrift stores and consignment stores or wear friends' clothes or family hand-me-downs before they end up at Goodwill. At Goodwill, a designer may be there to collect them, or they may be sorted and baled and sent to a rag house where large manufacturers may find them. The practice of recycling becomes ever important as throwaway fashion needs someplace to go.

This research investigated two stages of the process of reusing textile products (see Fig. 1) as it applies to women's clothes. How do women recycle their cast off clothing (make it available for an upcycler to collect), and are women open to buying someone else's cast offs (allow the retailer to re-sell) if they have been upcycled and recreated in a different form that reflects current trends? Women will be asked about their ideas and practices as it applies to their shopping habits, their textile recycling habits, as well as their acceptance of new ideas for upcycling women's fashion.

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

A fashion industry that is eco-friendly and contributes to a sustainable society is a goal at this point, and certainly the relationship is not yet harmonious. This industry can be environmentally active and contribute to our society more than just economically. Some companies donate a portion of their profits to good causes but in this case selling upcycled fashion can be the way to support the cause. Women are excited about new fashion and are willing to spend money on it and so the industry has to help women understand the power behind upcycling. There is both fashion opportunity and cause opportunity. Can those same women be propelled to close the recycling loop by buying upcycled fashion? We are still defining terms, concepts and processes as we marry activism, social justice, and social responsibility to the fun, sophistication, body-enhancing design and artistic expression that fashion embodies. The contribution aspect is not just about what we are giving and donating to, but about the “contributees,” the recipients, and the consumers. Retailers want profits and consumers, fashionistas want...well... fashion: trendy, on-the-celebrities and off-the-street amazing clothing and accessories. We are marrying fashion design and the future of our planet, a marketing challenge and a reality necessity. Put another way, “Ecofashion is where the environmental movement, the fashion industry, and marketing overlap. The problem is furthermore exacerbated by the speed of fashion, and servicing the twin demands for creativity and profit” (Thomas, 2008 p. 3). Beard writes about this issue as a challenge to democratize the relationship, so that brands become both eco-fashion brands and more fashionable to not just segments of the market, but to everyone (2008).

### **To upcycle**

The current movement to capture throwaway clothing and remake it into a different fashionable, wearable piece of clothing with greater value is called upcycling. Although some authors



have called it a trend, others consider it a movement that is here to stay. In the book *Fashion and Sustainability*, Fletcher and Grose (2012) define upcycling as “adding value through thoughtful reclamation” (p. 69). Murray (2002) describes it as “not merely conserving the resources that went into the production of particular materials, but adding to the value embodied in them by the application of knowledge in the course of their recirculation. So, if one can add value – economic, intellectual, emotional, material – to a product through the process of reuse, it can be called ‘upcycled’” (p. 3). The forward to the book, *Upcycle*, speaks of upcycling in general terms: “The goal of the upcycle is a delightfully diverse, safe, healthy, and just world with clean air, water, soil, and power - economically, equitable, ecologically, and elegantly enjoyed” (McDonough & Braungart, 2013 p. 12 ). If clothing is a necessity, fashion is a luxury - hopefully to be elegantly enjoyed. The elegance in recycling comes from skillful upcycling, not the “hippie” pieced fashions from the 60’s, but beautifully designed fashion. This paper is not just about recycled clothes but about fashion, the luxury we have to enjoy a trend and to update our look as often as we like, yet still elect to protect our resources. But even more, it is about recycling and upcycling to add value and uniqueness by the resulting one-of-a-kind design available for women to purchase in any retail store.

## **Over-consumption**

McDonough and Braungart (2013), speak of planned obsolescence as a way to stimulate our economy as in the 1930s, and at the opposite end where overconsumption rules, as a debt to the earth. Clothes that are meant to be used once were part of that original plan. Until recently, consumers bought a dress and wore it until it tore or were tired of it and cast it off; consumers did not think about where it went after that. Information on recycling has taught us to recycle plastic bags and newspaper, but what about fashion? Beard (2008) describes a polarization among consumers on the idea of ecofashion where they recycle common household trash like plastic bags

and cans but feel no guilt when they dispose of trendy fast fashion. Claudio (2007), discusses the current stockpile that exists in consumer wardrobes and the 67% increase that salvage charities (i.e. thrift stores) have seen in clothing donations since 2001. Upcycling is one way to take care of the over consumption in an environmentally responsible way and still satisfy the profitable fashion industry and fashion hungry consumers.

Birtwistle & Moore (2007) claim consumers have guilt feelings when disposing of expensive items. Cheaper clothes get worn out more quickly and are more easily thrown away. The pair also say that consumers do not understand or are not aware of the environmental issues involving man-made fibers and cotton production. Birtwistle and Moore (2007) commented that they found consumers had little interest in ethical and social concerns, and that they knew about the large quantities of clothing being produced.

The overconsumption of fashion is propelled by fast fashion and its cheap, constant flow of new designs and limited runs. Sull & Tuconi (2008) speak of the fast-fashion retailer Zara and the idea that Zara's assortments are refreshed more frequently than traditional retailers' in order to capture those who buy fashion. The Byun et. al.(2011) study confirms fashion hoarding for fear of scarcity in fast fashion stores with limited runs .Sull and Turconi (2008) state that "Fast fashion retailers have replaced the traditional designer-push model – in which a designer dictates what is 'in' – with an opportunity pull approach, in which retailers respond to shifts in the market within just a few weeks, versus an industry average of six months" (p. 2). How does that correlate with in-store or online purchasing of one of a kind upcycled items? The Byun et. al. (2011) study finds that the innovators appreciate the quickness and perishable nature of fashion. When a consumer sees an upcycled fashion item and they don't buy it, that opportunity is forever lost. The engagement in new products excites the senses.

## **Fashion democracy**

Here democratization is used in terms of bringing fashion to the masses and adapting those assortments as quickly as possible so that we can “all” buy more, change more, binge more on textiles and style, demand bigger closets in our new homes, and now create business models that capitalize on the throwaways after one wear or a few. If trends are captured quickly and speed up the fashion pace, those processes drive the price down (Cline, 2012). Who wants to pay a high price for something that is on the trend list for a short time? We have created a loop of binge, change, discard (see Figure 3) that is certainly contrary to the ecologically healthy loop we call recycling (reduce, reuse, recycle).

## **Closing the loop**

There have been attempts to close the fashion recycle loop with pieced, alternative looking, “hippie” type clothing and certainly there are attempts to shred man-made materials into new clothes. Niinimäki (2009) discusses what he sees as profound limitations on eco-fashion as wrinkled and less colorful. He declares from his research that 70% of consumers want eco-clothes to be the same as regular clothes, and only 30.2% want the refashioned nature to be obvious (Niinimäki, 2009). His advice is to develop the production and textiles aspect instead of offering new design concepts. Is the fate of natural materials only the trash bin to be burned for steam? Yet there are new design concepts being introduced as upcycled fashion, and those designers use natural materials such as cotton, leather, and silk.

What about quality? Cline (2012) says the pace of fashion is making quality and craftsmanship obsolete. She talks about the marketing for stores that tout quality of their merchandise, standards, testing, fittings, and product development protocol have been discontinued in fast fashion (Cline, 2012). As we look at the results, we discover consumers have been willing to accept styles with less

fabric, creating a lower price, and styles with lesser quality details have become trends as a result of price. These lesser quality details include raw edges, zippers on the outside, fewer sleeves or sleeve treatments, less detailing, and fewer added trims. The higher quality details create a need for slower production and higher costs. Our bingeing and lack of concern for quality has come at a cost greater than the dollars we pay out.

## **Secondhand**

Americans throw away 68 pounds of clothing a year, most of which goes to a landfill (Earth911, n.d.). Celebrities are recognizing their power in the sustainability cause and are choosing vintage over new to wear dresses on the red carpet. Some are recycling through donations to charity shops who embed quick response codes in their donations “offering snippets of the garments history” (Brown, 2013, p.14). The pendulum of concern about the genealogy of a dress is exaggerated if a celebrity owned it. A recycled second life as a vintage piece “as is” can work for a Versace gown or anything truly retro, a 60’s mini skirt, for example. In general, Western women buy more clothing and discard more often than men do, which means the world’s supply of women’s clothing is more than seven times that of men’s (Claudio, 2007). Sometimes people donate their clothing because of their desire to do good (Bristwistle & Moore, 2007).

Secondhand clothing shops offer another alternative for most discarded clothing, and according to Thomas (2008), this is where a piece of clothing can really extend its life:

Second-hand clothing shops are often run by charities and are generically called Oxfam shops (UK), Good Will, Thrift shops (USA) and Opportunity (Op) shops (Australasia). Garments may be sold on to merchants in developing countries. Sell through for thrift stores in the U.K. is about 50-75% (Britwistle & Moore, 2007). At this point they explain the second hand clothes may be given to countries for emergency relief or sold to recyclers. Alternatively, they

may be *upcycled*, *redeployed* or *downcycled*. *Upcycling* is when discarded garments have their value increased through altering or customizing. (Thomas, 2008, p.10)

There is currently research underway to find ways to give life to garments that have been deconstructed and reconstructed. Rebecca Earley, a Research Fellow at the University of the Arts in London and textile designer, has several projects underway to add value to recycled garments including the following (Earley, 2007):

- Digital printing onto reclaimed fabrics
- Using recycled non PVC laminate coatings onto vintage and damaged textiles
- Using sonic equipment to slit / mark polyester shirts to reshape and embellish them
- Fusing digital dye sublimation printing with heat photogram printing and hand painting onto charity shop garments
- Using electro-luminescent paste to overprint and give new function to secondhand substrates
- Using silver electro-plating techniques to add value to co-axial cable, creating jewelry and accessories
- Creating a dress service that has four future lives predestined using plastic packaging to create coatings for secondhand textiles, creating a water/weatherproof surface for use as exterior textiles
- Using laser technology to create new surface/decoration effects, with glue, printing inks, etc.

Goodwill, a common secondhand store in many towns across the United States, has created their own line up of upcycled clothing with the brand called "William Good," and they have made use of laser cutting to create very modern looking appliqués on clothing (Fletcher & Grose, 2012). In fact, there are many designers that consider upcycled fashion goods as pieces of art. By nature, recycled pieces can become one-of-a-kind, and in some cases, become multimedia pieces. These

techniques don't satisfy a lot of diehard recyclers who feel that clothing should close the loop and become recyclable over and over again. At the moment, clothing is not manufactured for a closed loop, although there certainly are plans and research moving forward in that direction. There is also the idea of reconditioning, which may include restyling garments without overprinting or some of the new technology mentioned above. Two companies, for example, Junky Styling and From Somewhere, both located in London, originally began by scouring thrift shops to find garments to reconstruct into their designs. According to Fletcher and Grose (2012), From Somewhere, an upcycling clothing design company, has been able to change their sourcing by buying post industrial waste from the cutting floor of high-end Italian mills, and these purchases give them a more predictable raw product than post-consumer waste. Junky Styling designers used to scour the thrift stores for secondhand suits to create their designs for women's clothing, and now they buy secondhand clothing straight from the manufacturers (Fletcher&Grose, 2012, p. 69). Consumers may find clothing deconstructed and reconstructed from either company on celebrities, on the average woman, and even in art museums.

### **Waste, art or fashion?**

Winge (2008), in her writings about how "green is the new black" says, "Eco-dress includes clothing, accessories, and shoes that may be designed, manufactured, transported, consumed, or recycled with methods and materials that reflect an enlightened consciousness about environmental issues and human and animal rights" (p. 4). Ecofashion must have all the same qualities as regular fashion, according to Sandy Black (2008). Design is what draws us in including the combination of colors, textures, the hand of the fabric, styling the silhouette; all of these things make the visual experience, "coupled with how it makes us feel and look when we put it on" (Black, 2008, p. 197).

Upcycled, ecofashion offers creativity and individuality because consumers won't see someone else wearing the same outfit. An ecodesigner, according to Lee & Sevier (2008), must face increased challenges of sourcing, designing with “green” issues in mind, and inventing new techniques that add value. In the past, designers associated with these methods would have been called extremists, but they have been paving the way for this eco-fashion movement including Fair Trade, organic and what they call “reclaimed wear” (Lee & Sevier, 2008). There are other recycling options including insulation, automobile soundproofing and furniture stuffing (Bristwistle & Moore, 2007).

### **Reclaimed consumers**

So who will buy this ecofashion, this upcycled, thrift store sourced, combination of pre-consumer and/or post-consumer textiles? Studies have conflicting research results as to who the market really is. Some studies say that the younger consumer is more open to the idea of recycling. Urban Outfitters certainly has catered to that group with their Urban Renewal line, a collection of one-of-a-kind young retro looking fashion pieced together from thrift store goods. Other studies say that it is mature women who both understand recycling and will buy upcycled fashion. The example of Asiatica, a company located in Kansas City with an inventory of postconsumer silk kimonos initially began to upcycle Western clothing from vintage Japanese fashions (Asiatica, n.d.). Now their inventory includes both new and secondhand textiles, and their target consumer is a modern, mature woman as evidenced by the photography and models used on their website.

There are two groups of consumers who may purchase these fashions, fashion opinion leaders and environmental opinion leaders (Domina & Koch, 1998). Domina and Koch claim that price is not important to a “real” green consumer. These authors have classified recyclers and these divisions may give insight into upcycled fashion buyers. The first group is “non-recyclers”. This

group never recycles and never reuses clothing. They are concerned about brand. The “economy recycler” is motivated by price and value over economic concerns, and often considers herself a fashion follower (Domina & Koch, 1998). These same authors profile a “charity recycler” as someone who is more concerned about intrinsic rewards, which take precedence over environmental issues. This consumer is more concerned about durability and quality, donates to help others and is also profiled as a fashion follower. Finally, the “environmental recycler” reuses and donates because of concern for the environment. They are price sensitive and want good customer service (Domina & Koch, 1998). Their insight on both green consumers and recyclers that donate the secondhand clothes is valuable as we look at consumers who may purchase upcycled fashion.

### **The price point**

The impression of most consumers is that ethical or eco purchases cost more than traditional merchandise. This is partly because green manufacturers are intent on paying a living wage for manufacturing (fair trade). Shaw et al. (2006) state that sweat-shop free or ethical clothing is beyond the means of some consumers, and that others will balance the cost against the cause (p. 11). Shaw et al. (2006) further found that, “Clothing which the respondents considered unrelated to, or not worn to reflect their identity was viewed as not worth the extra money or hassle to ensure fair trade and ethical manufacturing practices had been adhered to. In contrast, it was considered important to ensure the ethical credentials of those items and/or outfits which the consumer perceived as being connected to the projection of their identity” (p. 11). In a study by Lee and Sevier (2008), 27% of people said they would pay more for ethically produced clothing (p. 1). It appears that on the issue of price, there are conflicting reports. It is possible that the Lee and Sevier (2008) report did not consider identity. This paper will consider identity as fashions presented either “speak” to the women



interviewed, or they do not. If upcycled clothing can satisfy wants that include looking beautiful no matter what the origin of the clothing, will the higher price matter?

Price does matter in the traditional fashion world when it is tied to a fashion pedigree. We do know the brands or designer of the garment, we know where the clothing was made and we are certain about content. Certainly, some brands command a higher price for similar styles and fabrications as some brands with lower prices. How will that affect upcycled garments that may be made from pieces of many previously worn garments, or are made from textiles that are scooped up from the factory floor?

The pricing is a point of disagreement among researchers. Older studies found that mature women were willing to pay more for eco-friendly products. In 2001, Laroche et. al. found that 13.1% of respondents in their study were willing to pay more for greener products and more specifically, married women with children. They also found recycling behaviors were not good predictors as to who would pay more for environmentally friendly products, nor could they correlate the products they recycle with the green product made from those discards. Laroche et. al. (2001) state that consumers may express willingness to pay more but their behavior shows differently. They suggest more research on a specific industry with a specific clientele. In this case, it will be fashion for women with a look at generational preferences.

### **Generational preference**

The Cone (2006) Millennial Cause study attempts to evaluate Millennials in terms of their desire to involve themselves in environmental issues. Millennials have social awareness and have a desire to improve the world. They are civic-minded and the most socially conscious group to date (p. 5&7). Mainiery et al. (1997) study women and how their ages correlate to environmental behaviors. They discuss several studies that have found a reverse trend for age and that environmental concerns

were stronger for women over age 50. However, they state that environmental concerns and environmental behaviors are not necessarily connected. They did find that women were more likely than men to be environmental advocates (Mainiery et al., 1997), which appears to pair both concerns and behavior. These studies were conducted to find green buying behaviors. This research group did contend that women were more likely than men to use environmental concerns when shopping as a criteria. In a study by Shaw et al. (2006), of the respondents questioned about their intent to avoid sweatshop produced garments, 81% had a high level of intention to avoid such purchases, but only 32% upheld that intention when purchasing. The researchers agree that intention and behavior don't always match on ethical, sustainable or green issues. This study is designed to not just evaluate intentions but to discover potential barriers for a single green issue.

There are also concerns about identifying the age and education level of those who potentially recycle as well as environmental concerns and how they relate to environmental behaviors. Kollmuss and Agyeman (2002) evaluated barriers to pro-environmental behavior. Two demographic factors were found to be of primary importance in environmental behavior: age and education. Women appear to be more environmentally engaged, are more willing to change, and are more concerned about environmental destruction. Education certainly did equal knowledge, but knowledge was not always the deciding factor in environmental behavior. Immediate motives tended to rule green behavior, including being comfortable, saving time, and saving money. The altruistic and social values took second place (Kollmuss and Agyeman, 2002). Shrum et al. (1995) discuss a poll by Walter Johnson that claims that, "persons classified as most green tended to be better educated older females with high incomes and liberal orientation [*vid*]" (p. 2). They compare this idea to a Roper poll conducted by SC Johnson & Company that says that the greenest category of the population is white collared, female, with a higher level of education (Shrum et al., 1995). From the studies conducted, it

appears that green purchasing behavior may be affected by social well-being, personal well-being, and economic well-being (Sheth et al., 2011, p. 4).

Morgan and Birtwistle (2009) asserted that the younger age group are more concerned with recycling, yet that assertion seems to conflict with other studies. Walmart appears to agree. In a report quoting Fleming, Walmart's chief operating officer, he states, "When I go around to colleges and universities to recruit, sustainability is tops on their list. So I think this will help us build a better business model" (Rosenbloom, 2009, p. 3). Walmart says they are committed to green labeling with this younger customer in mind.

### **Fashion genealogy**

Siegle (2011) quotes eco-guru Wendall Berry when he states that we operate in a world where fashion histories, the history behind each garment will be lost. He considers it a degradation of products. Will consumers lose confidence or do we need to find solutions for the barriers, the new challenges that upcycling poses? Some upcycling business models use fabric sources that are very focused: parachutes, military uniforms, and the like. In Sass Brown's book, *Refashioned* (2013), she presents working designers using reclaimed fabrics or garments. She says that the history and heritage that accompanies those textiles gives them a story that consumers will want to know and will want to have. She says it "imbues them with a sense of value" (p. 11). McDonough and Braungart (2013) suggest some sort of provenance for recycled goods, a history of ownership, origins, and sources. This is a method often used to accredit art. This way, worth or a price has some logic tied to some criteria that we are familiar with. This industry has yet to determine consumer criteria for worth, desire, and excitement. This study is one step to help designers, manufacturers and retail understand their upcycle market.

## **The green agenda**

Consumerism is in conflict with green behaviors (Jones et. al., 2005). Researchers need to conduct studies like these to find out if the green agenda is gaining ground on the consumerism scale. Otherwise, consumerism, even luxury is often the agenda without regard for the cause at hand or here specifically, the color green. Do people care about present needs more than they care about the ability of our children to meet their needs, especially if resources are expended?

In a more recent study, consumers were interviewed on barriers to eco-conscious apparel in general. In the Hiller Connell study, knowledge about textile environmental issues and attitudes got in the way of greener apparel purchases (2011). Those attitudes included that these types of clothes are less stylish than mainstream clothes, and that the styles are too counterculture and could not be worn professionally (Hiller Connell, 2011). This same study included questions on thrift store shopping with comments about the shopping experience, including how merchandise was crammed on racks and how thrift stores felt like a barn. The study did not continue to discuss the other senses like smell involved in shopping there.

Marketing studies say that consumer purchases would be impacted if they had more information about their social responsibility, and too much would steer them away from that responsibility (Carrigan et. al., 2001). This tells how important labeling can be. Their research discusses purchases that are typically based on how much consumers like a product over ethical issues, citing the example that respondents shop at the ethically conscious Body Shop not because of the cause but because they liked the product. The tradeoff of their comfort zone of price, quality, and brand are difficult to give up in terms of a cause. If they could financially discriminate between socially responsible products, they would. Carrigan et. al. explain, “Consumers are unwilling to undergo any extra inconvenience in order to purchase ethically, and price, value, trends and brand

image remain the dominant influences over purchase choice. The importance of brand image comes before ethical criteria” (2001 p. 570).

## **Theoretical framework**

The Diffusion of Innovations theory is a framework that helps us to understand the introduction of an innovation described as an idea, behavior or product, and how they are “taken up” or accepted by society (Rogers, 2003). Rogers introduced this theory in 1962 and has reintroduced it most recently in his book *Diffusion of Innovations* now in its 5<sup>th</sup> edition. This study is concerned with introducing the idea of completing the recycling loop with fashion products that are made from our previously recycled products. We hope that consumers will be excited to look for and purchase upcycled fashion with a two-fold mission: to offer them current choices so that they continue to express their style as fashionable women and to become saviors of the resources of the earth (as only consumers can be). As designers, manufacturers and retailers, we are looking to develop fashionable products that will satisfy the diffusion values of cause, personal need, and want or desire--a tall, complicated order when fashion used to be just about shiny new buttons and bows.

Robinson (2009) is clear that this theory is not about persuading people to change but that the product evolves or is reinvented to meet the needs of people. Reinvention is what upcycling is all about. To reinvent a desirable product, Rogers states five reasons people are apt to accept it into their lifestyle. Can upcycled fashion satisfy these questions:

1. Does the item offer relative advantage? Advantages can be economics, social prestige, convenience, satisfaction. The greater the perceived advantage, the quicker the adoption.
2. Is the product compatible with existing values and practices?
3. Does the product offer simplicity and ease of use?
4. Are consumers able to try it or experiment with it?

5. Are there observable results? (Rogers, 2003)

Fashion has a unique place in this theory. Social conformity or social contagion accounts for the diffusion (Sproles, 1974). He explains that the adoption patterns given by Rogers are a bit different for fashion and he offers some adaptation. The following illustrates the acceptance portion of his ideas:

1. Adoption leadership by change agents
2. Social visibility
3. Conformity in and across social systems “becomes a new set of fashion tastes”
4. (Sproles, 1974)

The change agents in fashion are typically fashion leaders and trends are worn by the more adventurous who are experimental with trends. In the case of this study, 45% of the respondents classified themselves as women who are experimental with fashion. Social visibility is achieved by leaders in social groups and that may include celebrities who are unafraid to introduce a new trend. Finally the follower adopts the trend as they are now comfortable that the new idea or fashion is acceptable attire. At this point the style is worn by many and is no longer truly new. This is also commonly referred to as “trickle-down” or fashion that starts at the top of society be it someone rich or visibly social and trickles down to the masses.

Rogers (2003) also points out that early adopters are the risk takers and don't need to be validated by other's opinions. The remaining adopters see risk as change and need the validation of peers (2006). Right now, the conformity idea listed by Sproles (1974), has some resistance in the current realm of fashion philosophy. The indie philosophy claims independence from typical social fashion ideas and is based on alternatives. Being different on purpose is a popular way to dress. Upcycled fashion can help this group address their own fashion style because the designs are by nature one of a kind. The indie philosophy of expressing fashion style independently could actually

boost the popularity of upcycled fashion. Currently, there are A list celebrities listed on the Preloved website who buy and wear their upcycled one of a kind clothes. There is attention from indie shoppers for upcycled clothes on the Urban Renewal (Urban Outfitters) website. Urban Renewal sells both original vintage and upcycled pieces, and they use the term upcycled in their descriptions of merchandise. The garments are not always current fashion but they are different and often retro. This is an ideal way for those who want to be self-expressive to find fashion that fits their style. Upcycled fashion represents an idea and so its relative advantage can come from prestige, satisfaction in self-expression, and even altruism. There may be conformity to the cause behind it but non-conformity may be the benefit from wearing these particular fashions. Additionally, some people say they can recognize upcycled fashion by its pieced nature. If so that recognition may speed up the diffusion process.

I have found many designers and manufacturers from all over the world who are beginning to deconstruct and reconstruct recyclables to make current women's fashion. Even celebrities are wearing the upcycled clothing. Magazines tout the photographs of eco-conscious starlets like Julia Roberts, Kate Hudson and Kirsten Dunst who are devotees of companies like Preloved, a Canadian fashion company that makes one-of-a-kind garments from reclaimed fabrics (Preloved, n.d.). The trend has started some momentum, but there have been some difficulties in acceptance, especially for designers and manufacturers who target older age groups. The younger teen group has accepted this trend with brands like Urban Outfitters or Urban Renewal and stores that sell vintage items “as is” like Ragstock. I will not be researching the under 25 group, but will instead will research Millennials 25 and over.

## **Significance**

This research is important because if we, as a society, accept the idea that we should recycle, we also have to accept the idea that we have to buy the goods that come from that practice.

Otherwise, the point of recycling is lost. This research will explore the ideas of upcycling and discover if women consider a purchase made from cast offs, what are the elements and the criteria under which we would make that purchase? It seems that it is really about our feelings about pre and post-consumer leftovers. What makes recycled...upcycled clothing acceptable, even exciting in the marketplace of women's fashion? This research and results of the study will be of value to designers and manufacturers in the creation and selling process of fashion.

Technology has given much more opportunity for trends to push up rather than trickle down. Urban fashion, street fashion, and indie fashion move that way. I believe that is where recycling starts. There are leaders on the runway and the street, but this fashion trend has a cause behind it. Never before did we worry that the dress we choose may change the world. That changes the dynamics of fashion.



## METHODS

A combination of quantitative and qualitative research methods were used to explore the ideas of consumer habits and desires of upcycled clothing. Twenty women between the ages of 25 and 65 were surveyed and interviewed using a form of triangulation. Triangulation is defined as a mixing of different methods (Olsen, 2004). This method may use two or more forms of evidence. This study uses both qualitative and quantitative methods, including surveys and interviews. The specific benefit of triangulation is to help validate any claims in a pilot study (Olsen, 2004). The women completed a short email survey that asked about demographics and habits as it was determined that this would decrease personal interview time so that the actual interview could concentrate on the collection of ideas. This initial quantitative approach of 14 multiple choice questions was used prior to the interview to gather demographics and to briefly establish general recycling habits and shopping habits. The women were emailed with the survey in advance of the interview. Women in the survey were divided into generational groups to look at possible comparison, especially for the Baby Boomer and Millennial groups. Ages were divided by Baby Boomers (age 48-65) born 1946-1965, Generation X (age 34-47) born 1966-1978 and Millennials (starting at age 25 to 33) born 1979-1988 (American Psychological Association, 2012). The survey was followed by a personal interview, some accomplished by phone and some in person depending on the convenience for the interviewee and their location. Participants were emailed instructions and a link to the Qualtrics email survey with a personal identification number to enter the site. A picture bank of upcycled fashions for use in the interview to follow, was included in the email as well.

All interviewees were asked the same 13 questions, and it was anticipated that questions could expand as new recycling and upcycling ideas and attitudes emerged. Some possible follow-up questions were developed in advance, and other questions evolved from the topics that the women

brought forward. Each interview was recorded, and I took notes as a second source. Preferences were evaluated and analyzed. Interviews took place once and ranged from 20 minutes to 45 minutes with an average of about 28 minutes. The 20 interviews were conducted during the months of February and March, 2014. The notes were reviewed, and the interviews were played back to confirm that their thoughts were accurately expressed.

The Institutional Review Board gave approval to this research as exempt under category two. The 20 participants were collected using the snowball technique and were identified by age, education, occupation and recycling and shopping habits. Participants were told that I was conducting research about fashion and recycling. Participants were asked initially if they fit into the age parameters and if they like fashion and if they do a lot of shopping for clothing. There were two women who fit into the age parameters but who did not like to shop. They were not asked to complete the survey or do the interview.

The participants were interviewed with a series of questions about their shopping habits and preferences as they relate to buying women's apparel as well as recycling and upcycling ideas. They were told that they would not be named or identified personally in any way and that any answers would be used anonymously. They were promised confidentiality and only I would have access to individual data, which would not be identified by name.

The interview questions are time and interest dependent. Many of the 13 basic questions could elicit short answers. For example someone may answer questions 1 and 2 with only a sentence: "I keep my clothes a long time and get rid of things that don't fit me" or "I think secondhand clothes should go to the poor." Follow-up questions were developed to use if short answers did not reveal much information, or if something the participant said would cue an interesting topic to probe more deeply.

Some pre-education was required during the interview. Recycling was discussed and some of the avenues for reusing textiles was reviewed. For example, we talked about shredding polyester and current products made from recycled polyester that they may have seen. Upcycling was defined and the sources for reclaimed textiles was explained. A variety of retailers who are already selling these upcycled garments was also discussed.

The interview also included the use of a picture bank with samples of current upcycled fashion as it was assumed that interviewees may not have awareness of the options. Appendix D includes the photographs of upcycled fashion used in the interview as well as the information that was given to subjects about the upcycled fashions and the designers, manufacturers and retailers who sell them. The picture bank was emailed with the instructions for the email survey and was referred to during the interview.

Interviewees were told that results would be reported as group responses or as individual responses with no identifier; for example, a quote may be used from one participant with no traceable identification. The questions and script are included in Appendices A-C. The variety of upcycled examples from the picture bank were discussed with questions during the interview. Those pictures are included in the Appendices and were selected for the variety in options of upcycled fashion styles that range from indie to high fashion and methods of recycling that include pre- and post-consumer combinations. They also include recycled goods from international sources. The interviewees were asked if they would consider making a purchase and barriers or propelling interest and purchase elements were discussed.

The bulk of this research is a qualitative study intended to bring forward emerging ideas, and so meaning in this small study does not necessarily correspond with numbers of participants. Baker and Edwards (2012) say that qualitative research studies have fewer people but delves deeply into the conversation to get an understanding of how and why people feel and do what they do. Qualitative

research is about discovery and gathering data until saturation, which may not be possible in the small numbers (Baker & Edwards, 2012). None of the ideas expressed in this study are considered invalid even if they are expressed by only one respondent. The discovery of feelings, attitudes and intended behaviors are explored, and follow-up questions are tailored to those individual expressions.

Qualitative research is exploratory by nature and is subjective in order to reveal how and why. I will identify those emerging ideas by looking for:

1. Ideas not common to traditional retail situations
2. Unusual associations between fashion products and purchases
3. Resistance or interest or excitement about new upcycling fashion ideas

The semi-structured in-depth interviews are common in qualitative research and often have additional questions emerging from the dialogue (DiCicco- Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). In fact, these authors state that some digression from planned questions is important as it can explore the interest and knowledge of the participant. The purpose here is to look at future barriers, “what if” attitudes as upcycled fashion is introduced, and iteratively look at its future as a mainstream creative product/social fashion cause/profitable venture for designers, manufacturers and retailers. The newness of this fashion product requires exploration of rich data containing potential meanings from a cross section of the shopping public.

The population of the study reflects the diversity of shoppers in stores geared toward women’s fashions. The snowball technique works well to explore this question. In Grand Forks, ND, for example, there is a very transient population, which actually makes a good mix for this type of survey. There are consumers from the Air Force base that have lived all over the world, and there are women who have come to the area because of the University of North Dakota from both large and small towns across the country. There are also farm families and professional families that have been recruited here by companies like Amazon and Cirrus. I was able to find subjects who are in blue and

white-collar occupations as well as at home mothers. I am closely associated with a group of women in Washington D.C., a club of women in Crookston and the surrounding rural area, my church women's group in Grand Forks (several of which live on the Air Force Base), and many women in Minneapolis, MN. This study included women from around the country, from both ends of the selected age range and in a multitude of life situations similar to the shoppers entering any retail store.

## FINDINGS

The initial survey questions gathered demographic responses. There were 20 survey respondents, 40% were born between 1949 to 1965 (Baby Boomers), 20% were born between 1966 to 1976 (Generation X), and 40% were born between 1977 to 1988 (Millennials). Five of the respondents were educated through high school, 11 of the respondents had undergraduate degrees, and four of the respondents had graduate or postgraduate degrees. The current work or career of each respondent was surveyed, and the results showed that 25% of the respondents were homemakers, 30% were in the service or sales sector, 40% were professionals, and 5% were other (student). The Millennial group and the Baby Boomer group had equal numbers of professional women.

Some of the psychographics were also evaluated in the e-mail survey in terms of recycling and shopping behaviors. Recycling behaviors were evenly reported between the generational groups with 90% of the overall respondents stating that they do recycle at home. The types of items they recycle most included plastics and glass, and paper/magazines/cardboard, and the textiles and clothing category was in the number three spot. The frequency of recycling differed between the three groups. None of the Baby Boomers try to recycle everything they discard; however, 25% of the other two groups do. All of the Baby Boomers answered that they recycle as often as they can. The lowest responses on this question came with the Millennials where 25% recycle only when it's convenient. This is at odds with an earlier question about recycling where one respondent did say that she does not recycle any materials.

The three groups also differed in terms of where they dispose of unwanted clothing. Baby Boomers overwhelmingly use a consignment store and a thrift store. Millennials overwhelmingly use thrift stores, and then they often give away their discards, or trade with family and friends.

Consignment stores are not very popular with the Millennial group. Generation X was comparable with the Millennial group. The subjects who sew in the group numbered 50% of the Baby Boomer and Generation X category and only 25% of Millennials. The money spent on clothing each month per individual also differed by generational group with 50% of the Baby Boomers spending over \$150 a month and a few over the \$500 mark. The entire Generation X and Millennial populations stayed under the \$500 mark. The discretionary fashion income also reflected on the types of traditional retail stores that they most often shop for fashion.

Overall, the top choice identified for places to shop was outlet stores like TJ Maxx, Nordstrom Rack, or Ralph Lauren factory outlet, with 85% of the respondents answering they most often shop in these stores. Respondents could check up to three. Sixty-six percent of the Boomers shop at high-end department stores, and none of them shop at the discounters for clothing. However, at the opposite end, 25% of the Millennials shop at discounters such as Target, Kmart, or Wal-Mart for clothing and their second choice was the midrange department stores such as Macy's, JCPenney, or Kohls. There is only one Boomer respondent, or 5% of the total, who shops mostly for designer labels like Chanel, Versace or Valentino. Chain stores were more popular for the Generation X respondents with 75%, making it a top choice. That choice was at half or less for the other two groups.

It is important to note that 45% of respondents said that they are experimental with fashion and make their own trends. This is a key market for upcycled clothing as it has not entered mainstream fashion. Five of those were Boomers and four were Millennials. Only 10% follow the newest trends from celebrities, and the rest of the respondents either wait for friends before they try something new or dress for convenience.

The topic of the survey at this point switched to focus on shopping for recycled clothing. Consignment stores were the top choice for Baby Boomers, who rarely buy at thrift stores.

Generation X and Millennials both gave consignment stores and thrift stores as a top choice for buying recycled clothing. According to their answers on the survey, between 15% and 25% do not buy recycled clothing from any of these sources. When the respondents buy recycled clothing, they first look for quality brand-name clothing and only 25% look for vintage clothing. Since the closet at home is the resource for fashion discards, respondents had seven choices to describe their closet at home. Forty five percent said that their closet was organized and full of current clothes that they wear and love. The rest of the answers were spread among the other categories except for the Baby Boomers. The Baby Boomers are the 15% who said that their closet was filled with clothes that have meaning and that it's hard to get rid of them.

### **The interview**

The interview began where the electronic survey left off. Some of the early interview themes involved where they donate, where they buy pre-worn clothes and their feelings about wearing pre-worn clothes in general. The questions also covered shopping habits for traditional fashion and then queried attitudes about upcycled clothing. The pictures of a variety of upcycled fashions were discussed and then the women were asked about their ideas and feelings on labeling and cleaning, and merchandising. All of the questions were designed to explore ideas and so sometimes the conversation went deeper as the women discussed the cause of recycling and how these upcycled clothes might fulfill their fashion requirements.

The women were all unfamiliar with the topic of upcycling and some education including definitions and descriptions of the pictures were an instructional tool. It was necessary for the researcher to diffuse the information and so the transition from the survey to the interview was meant to guide them into from the familiar into the unfamiliar topic of upcycling. The last two survey questions were richer, more descriptive questions. It was hoped that the deeper feeling questions



would come later in the interview after the respondents were comfortable with where the interview was going, and that they would also be comfortable with giving answers full of rich content themselves. We continued to move into their closet and found that 15% of the Baby Boomers admit to having multiple closets, even 3 to 4 closets full of clothing. It was also a Baby Boomer phenomenon that 25% of these subjects keep their clothes because of meaning or a memory attached to clothing. Those women talked about the “what if”: what if they might wear it again or needed it again and those factors made it difficult to purge their closet. Thirty three percent of the women reinvent their clothing regularly either on their own or by taking it to a tailor. One respondent says that she spends a lot of money on her clothing and that makes it difficult to get rid of the clothing. The only way she would feel better about it is to resell them on consignment. More than half of the women in this group sell their clothing on consignment.

Across the generational groups, women who buy from thrift stores often re-donate to thrift stores with the idea that if they buy it and it doesn't fit or if they don't like it, they can very quickly re-donate it back to the thrift store. They were proud to say that they can constantly have a new closet with this method. Admittedly, the thrift store is an extension of their closet. They put things on hold at the thrift store, they have the salespeople let them know when clothing is available to them in their size or style and they go often. They know the salespeople at the thrift store by name and those same salespeople know what they like and they call them when something comes in that might appeal to them. Some of the thrift stores have sales, for example, five dollars a bag, so that they can very easily trade clothing back to the thrift store. This way they have a constant flow of “new to them” alternatives. They look for name brands and tell me they can find lots of things with tags still attached. These women like to buy jeans that are already broken in, sometimes they find pristine vintage pieces, and they look for high-end brand names. The strategy is to typically go to thrift stores

in richer neighborhoods. Some of these thrift stores have fashion shows, merchandise the racks, and have displays. There were several women that admitted to going several times a month.

A few of the Generation X and Baby Boomer shoppers also mentioned that they donate to the thrift store to get tax deductions, once again helping to keep some of the value for the clothing that they paid for. Twenty-five percent of the boomers never go to thrift stores to shop for clothing; they only donate. Some of the women who shop at thrift stores enjoy talking about how much they paid. One woman says she loves to tell somebody that she only paid \$20 from head to toe. One Millennial respondent says she gets “the itch” to go to Savers and sift through the rack and will buy 5 to 6 items at one time. A few mentioned the cause behind the thrift store, that Goodwill or the Salvation Army are good causes for their donations of secondhand clothing.

Women did mention what they call the “stink” that comes from thrift stores. One respondent described the smell of second hand clothes as a “dated smell.” Several had strong reasons they do not like to go in, including crammed racks and no organization. One Generation X respondent talked about the bad karma or bad energy that she feels when she is in a thrift store sometimes.

The younger group tended to trade or give their clothing to friends more often than the older group. Yard sales were mentioned only once as one woman doesn't donate her clothing at all but has a yard sale to recoup as much money as possible.

The Baby Boomers really enjoy taking their clothes to a consignment store as they feel they are retaining the value for clothes that originally cost them a lot of money. The consignment stores also offered some of the same advantages that department stores used to offer as far as relationships with the women who shop. They tell me the owner might say, “I thought of you when I was going through clothes this morning brought in by one of our wealthier customers.” Twenty-five percent of the Boomers call consignment shopping a treasure hunt as they find high value in their purchases and they may go once or twice a week just to see if they can find a real bargain.

The Baby Boomers purge their closet at least once a year or sometimes spring and fall. The Millennials, however, purge their closet much more often, sometimes continuously, sometimes once every two or three months. Fit was the number one reason that women purge their closets, but the Millennial group talked about how their clothing gets worn out quickly, gets holes quickly, or looks worn. Current fashion offers a lot of tissue fabrics and very thin fabrics as a result of fast fashion. Those textiles are typically offered to the young, which would make sense in that their clothing might wear more quickly. Since this group also spent the least amount of money on clothing, it is possible that they are buying cheaper fabrics.

There are some women who loyally donate and shop for secondhand clothes, and some women who only donate. So what are their feelings about wearing pre-worn clothes from any source? Seventy-five percent of the Baby Boomers said that wearing secondhand clothes does not bother them, but a few of them make it clear that they were talking about wearing secondhand clothing from their own family, more like heirlooms. One woman talked about a coat she wears that belonged to her mother. Her mother wore the coat to the 1980 Olympics, and there are feelings attached to her mother and the event where her relative was an Olympian. Another loves to wear her sister's clothing.

One of the women who buys expensive clothing avoids this question with a vague answer, possibly concerned about a judgment, so I asked if she would wear pre-worn clothing if it carried a high-end designer brand like Versace or Chanel. She said that if she liked it, it was possible, and she says she has looked at pre-used designer handbags. Another respondent says she does not wear pre-worn clothing ever. Everyone in the Generation X category would wear pre-worn clothes, but they have some things they would not touch like undergarments or swimwear. They often avoid things that need to be dry cleaned. A few of the Millennials said that they had worn hand-me-downs, but once again, this was family clothing. One said she would only wear pre-worn clothing if it was from a

friend (she has a newscaster friend who spends a lot of money on clothes and passes them down to her).

There was a conversation about germs during the question about wearing pre-worn apparel and it comes up again later when we talk about labeling. Several of the women express that there is some concern about germs that are hiding in secondhand clothes, and they want to make sure that they are clean. It is the Millennials that are concerned about bed bugs in the clothes. Cleaning suggestions include freezing and steaming and, of course, washing and dry-cleaning. The answer that came up the most was that pre-worn clothes should go through a sanitizing process. Some of the conversations focused on germs that might pass from one piece of clothing to another. They wanted to make sure germs are not being passed from shoes or hats.

The initial resistance to the thrift store variety of used clothes, the main textile for upcycled fashion, is substantial and is noted. The reader should also note in the following questions, as the interviewees are made aware of the possibilities, told about celebrity wearings, and find artistic beauty, meaning, and fashion currency in different treatments of upcycled clothing, there is a transformation in answers about wearing preworn clothing. This happens over the next 20-30 minutes.

## **Transformation**

There is a total split among respondents as to whether brand is important in fashion purchases. Those that believe brand is important were also the ones that stated that they would look for high quality brands in upcycled clothing. The group agreed that brand clothing fits better, and that they could depend on its quality and the trends from that brand. The brand offerings give them confidence in their fashion choices. They don't mind the price because they say price is reflective of a higher quality. Many respondents still stated that they would look at stitching and seams. Ten percent said they would get a higher resale on better brands when they take it to a consignment store. A third

of the Millennial group say the brand is important because they don't have to try it on. Those that said brand was not important said that they were still looking for good quality and that they could find it without a big brand name or a high price. This answer reflects back on the number one shopping choice of this entire group which was outlet stores like T.J. Maxx.

Vintage was defined by respondents as either classic quality or vintage inspired. Many admitted they wouldn't really know the difference if they saw it. One subject said, "I do like the real vintage because they often have fun patterns, they are quirky styles, and they make me feel happy." Twenty-five percent of the Millennials said they don't wear vintage because it's too much like alternative clothing as compared to another 25% that said the vintage is "cool" as long as it fits their style. One Gen X respondent looks for and wears retro wool skirts as she says she gets classics, style, and history all in one.

In every age group, respondents said that they had not seen any tags on clothing in a traditional retail shopping experience that say "recycled." When asked if they would wear it or buy it, even the Baby Boomers said it could be "very cool," or "awesome." One woman who recycles everything says that this clothing would be much more meaningful to her. The definition most often given for recycled was a new design out of old or taking something old and washing it and making it new. I was not exactly sure what they were visualizing at this point because some comments seemed to indicate that the recycled clothes had gone through a complete transformation if they were being sold in a traditional store. It was almost as if the traditional store would guarantee that everything was okay, and the cleaning and the smell or anything worn looking would not be allowed in the stores that they trust. These ideas were confirmed by some of the respondents later in the interviews. Most had not heard of processes like shredding polyester.

These Millennial women say they like recycling and natural food. Sustainability was mentioned and even the green movement. One of the women says she takes her bike to work rather

than drives her car. But they don't associate those sustainable activities with recycling pre-worn clothing. This activity interferes with the most intimate territory, their body image in addition to the whole sanitizing issue. One of the most evasive answers about buying recycled clothes was a Baby Boomer who said, "I would look at it and give it more of a nod." A few respondents had heard about shredding polyester but had never seen any garments made from it.

At this point in the interview, I qualified exactly what type of recycled clothing we would be discussing. I explained about deconstructing secondhand clothing that is then reconstructed and is made into new current fashion. Next, I defined upcycling. Those that looked at the pictures I sent in the original email began to associate them with our discussion. We went through the pictures, and I discussed the styling, the manufacturing, the philosophy of the companies, and how they got the reclaimed textiles. Answers began to change in response to questions about recycling and their recycling ideas. In fact, for the Boomers, they were all positive responses. One woman said they would value upcycled fashion more because they were purchasing it for a cause. Meaning was attached to these upcycled clothes because of their history or the era they came from, and so there would be meaning in this purchase in two different ways; the clothes had a story about their previous life, and the clothes were recycled or cause related. Most liked the idea that it would be unique and one-of-a-kind and confirmed that they would make a purchase. One woman began to see pricing issues and expressed how expensive these garments might be. She said it would be hard to justify the extra "bucks" to say that it would be recycled.

### **Upcycled fashion as art**

The women began to understand that these garments could be very artistic, and they spoke of how the unique character would add value. Once again, there were more mixed results from those who felt that these might be very fashion forward pieces with a higher price. They began to express

that if upcycled garments are one of a kind, they might pay a higher price. Another participant said that she would consider a purchase, but she was concerned about piecing materials in it so that it would be too “funky.” Another Millennial was concerned about the upcycled garments being outrageous and more left field. Most of them said that they wear clothing that fits their personality, and there was some concern that this may be too different from other styles. One woman was concerned that the placement of the prints would be off because these may not be manufactured as carefully as the name brands they are used to. The price/quality comparison was being considered here. If recycled clothes were viewed as poor quality, then they could not justify the price no matter how artistic the design was.

More than half of the Baby Boomers felt that it was better to have a brand name used in upcycled fashion products. They said they would feel better if they knew that good brands were used as textiles and they would be more apt to purchase it. One person was specific that she would want designer brands, even couture brands used in upcycled clothes. They were concerned about fabric quality. Those that liked the upcycled styles said they would buy them whether they used brand name secondhand textiles or not. The Generation X group was more unanimous in their idea that brand does not matter with upcycled clothing. That was fairly consistent with their answer on regular clothing as well. What would matter to them is that it was recycled and that it had an interesting history. The ultimate fabric would be both recycled and eco-friendly or organic. Sixty-six percent of the Millennials said that they don't care about brand names for upcycled clothes. Those that do care about brand names said that brand names are more textural and they could tell a good brand just by looking. They said they can use their instincts to see if something is good quality and that they would know where the fabrics came from in terms of the original brand of the garment even if the labels were not there. In some aspects, they were clear that they would not want brands like Rue 21 or Old

Navy because those are low-end quality brands from their experience. Those brands are okay for a first time use but not a reuse situation.

## **The story**

The story of the clothing became a major theme in their answers. In most of the rest of the questions, respondents talked about the meaning behind the clothes and they had a fascination with what kinds of stories might be there. Who wore them? What locales did they come from? Was there history? Could we find out? There was some intrigue here. Some of the answers involved the idea that the clothing would have more conversational value; another said “I might pay more if it touches the heart.” Originally, they only cared about the country of origin for the recycled textiles used in upcycled fashion, but they carried it further by asking if they could even be given the locale where the reclaimed textiles came from as that would add to the story. A few of the women thought that maybe some of the secondhand clothing might come from near where they lived or where they grew up, and that would have some fascination for them.

The country of origin in terms of loyalty to the United States or beyond did not seem to have much value as these women had more of a global view. The garment might be made in the U.S. but the textiles could have a different origin. They thought maybe some of the secondhand clothes might come from an interesting foreign country. There wasn't much resistance about where they were made; they just wanted to know the country of the textile's origin as it related to the story of the garment. I did add to their visualization of this concept by talking about an example of a shirt made of flannel from lumberjacks in Bemidji, MN, versus flannel from the shirts of guitar pickers in Memphis, TN. Most said that they would want to know the origin because it would make a difference and that would add to their desire to purchase. Only one person was indifferent to the idea of the genealogy of a piece of clothing. Somehow, the conversation went back to how clean the garments



were in the locales previously mentioned. Lumberjacks and guitar players sweat. The ideas about cleanliness came from different women at different times in the conversation.

For some of the women, the brand was also part of the story about what collage of well-known brands might be used and pieced together. They felt it might add to the intrigue even if they could just say high-end brands and not be specific about which brands. There was a little bit of discussion as to whether the use of multiple different high end-brands in the making of an upcycled piece of clothing was even legal. They questioned what the manufacturers, designers, or brands might think about their clothes being used in that way. One woman summed up the barriers when she said, “People who buy those higher brands take care of them, clean them better, and so I would want to purchase those pieces.”

Niche fabrics could be pulled from thrift stores or the rag houses that bale the leftovers. Fabrics can be sorted for use in upcycled clothing whether they might be leather or wool men’s suits or acetate from eveningwear. The upcycled clothing could use leathers pieced together exclusively to make a garment. The questions involving the use of niche fabrics provoked a more insightful look at upcycled clothing from the respondents. They began to see a more creative angle to upcycling and how recycled clothing might be constructed to meet their needs. I got multiple answers here, but I could see that there was already a change in their image of upcycled clothing. Now suddenly, it didn’t matter what fabrication was used as they would all have a story. Once again, niche fabrics gave them a certain fascination that there would be a story and something to talk about. We talked about one of the niche fabrics mentioned, military uniforms, as a way to find and use fabric for upcycling. I fed the visualization that was going on and to some said “What if the military uniforms were from a foreign country?” and “What if they were a foreign country that was in a war that was in the news like the soldiers from Russia or Crimea?” The possibilities in their mind were rolling at this point. Most said they would prefer an adventurous story and would tell the people the story, especially if it were

something like an expired parachute or military uniform that was used in their clothing. A few women couldn't imagine a parachute as an evening gown, and two of the women asked for the specific website so that they could see it. They were actually excited about the possibility. One woman realized during our conversation she had already purchased an upcycled military jacket from Urban Outfitter's Urban Renewal line, and she pulled it from her closet to look at the labeling during our interview. The idea of adventurous fashion with a story became a fashion garment that they were excited about. To wear an upcycled garment would make them adventurous. The fact that the story behind the clothes would now be part of them was a very interesting concept.

Other interesting approaches came up more than once in the interviews as the interviewees thought about the possibilities for clothing. One idea was a multimedia approach to recycled fashion. Maybe more than textiles could be used on upcycled clothes. We discussed adding to secondhand clothes in a topical way such as printing on top of them or laser cutting them. A few women were concerned that we were adding more chemicals and more processes to an item and that we were defeating the purpose of recycling. One woman who has a very prominent professional position said that she would be more apt to buy upcycled items, especially ones that had been reprocessed in some way as accessories. In fact, she hoped that someone would make these into bracelets or scarves or belts. The Millennials were the most enthusiastic about niche fabrics or topical applications. One said the topical applications would be more appealing if they had confidence in the fabric. Several others said that manufacturers would be adding chemicals to a garment that was supposed to be being recycled. In the same conversation, again they asked if the garment would still be able to be sanitized. Every question about a purchase was often followed by "if I liked it."

## **Labeling**

The labeling requests for upcycled fashion were fairly basic; all groups wanted cleaning instructions and content if possible, because some of them have allergies or don't like wearing certain fabrics. They would want to know the locale. At this point, it was not the country, it was the locale that they wanted on the label: the state and the city. Several of them mentioned they did not want to be dry cleaning these clothes and would hope that all of these would be washable garments as dry-cleaning uses more chemicals and negates the idea of recycling. Since these upcycled garments reflect a cause and represent our stewardship of the world, women also wanted to know a little bit about how these products, these fashion garments or these accessories protect the environment and a little bit about this cause. They wanted to know if anything on this garment could or would be handmade, and they would hope these were not being mass-produced in a foreign country. We discussed what mass-production is all about and that in fact, someone could use a factory to make these by using the same patterns over and over again on deconstructed clothes. We talked about bolts of pre-consumer fabric at factories and depending on the quantity, they could also mass-produce. That process seemed to make these clothes less appealing.

## **Cleaning**

Sanitizing and making sure there were no germs in these upcycled clothes came up from several of the respondents again during this part of the interview. They were specifically asked how the garments should be cleaned. They were concerned about bacteria and that maybe by repeatedly washing these garments they could be ruined because they might be more fragile. The fabric is after all, secondhand. Bed bugs were brought up again. One of the women remarked again that she had confidence in the retail store to put out clothing that had been cleaned properly. If the store carried upcycled clothing, she would have confidence that the store had made sure those garments had been

cleaned properly. One woman said that the germs would be in the back of her mind when she was trying on the garments. Two of the respondents mentioned steaming to zap out germs and that they worry about germs. A couple of them were concerned about the stink that may follow those garments out of the thrift store and stay with the upcycled garment. Another woman felt that dry-cleaning would make a garment look fresher and sanitize it so that she didn't have to worry about germs. One mentioned that she was very comfortable using Dryel, a home dry cleaning product that uses steam and advertises no toxic chemicals. She uses Dryel at her home regularly for thrift store purchases.

The greater concern seemed to be that there were many thrift store garments that would be used to make one garment and the greater the sources of the garment, the greater the possibility for germs and bacteria. One woman knew about eco dry-cleaning, and I introduced the concept to the women who were less familiar and they seemed comfortable with that idea. Still, most of these women were talking about buying these upcycled fashions because they would look twice at them in the store, and think the idea seemed fun and creative.

## **Pricing**

Most of the women seemed to understand the amount of work that would have to go into these upcycled garments, and most of the interviewees believed that these clothes would cost more than the average garment or a comparable garment. One woman compared pricing of an upcycled garment to the price of art, and she expected to pay the same. Only one respondent from the Baby Boomer group felt that these items should be comparable to a new garment and should not be high-end. The Gen X group felt that price would be above a comparable item because of the work they would expect to have to go into it. They expected it to be as expensive as something sold in a

boutique or specialty store but wished that upcycled clothes would be comparably priced to fashion that they normally buy.

The Millennials once again gave a farrago of answers for pricing. I heard many times over during the interviews that their decisions were more about looks than the cause and they would pay more for looks than they would pay for the cause. Millennials tended to have some reservation about price for upcycled clothing. There was great concern that upcycling may cause a price increase as compared to something comparable. One Millennial woman said “recycled probably means more expensive,” and that it should be affordable to everyone. Some also felt the story behind it would make it more expensive, but still overall, they wish it would be comparable to other garments. Another person felt that upcycled fashion should be priced less than a comparable garment because after all, this is used material.

The idea of democratic fashion was raised again and again as several of the respondents said that if a garment is recycled, it should be available to the masses in terms of pricing; otherwise, what was the point of recycling, if consumers couldn't afford it? It became apparent that if an upcycled garment and a new garment were placed in front of them and they didn't feel comfortable about the cleaning or the labeling or the pricing, they would choose the regular garment. The upcycled garment really had to satisfy a multitude of criteria. Many of the Millennials said they can't be as particular about what they buy because of economic issues.

### **The combinations, the fabrications**

I presented a few of the ways that textiles might be acquired and used for upcycled garments including post-consumer textiles from thrift stores or pre-consumer factory excess. I referred to the pictures as I included examples of these combinations. For the 25% of interviews that were done in person rather than on the phone, I wore an upcycled skirt that was a combination of recycled leather

pieces in the front and new ponte knit on the side and back. I gave three combinations to consider. The garment might be totally made from recycled textiles, the garment might be made from pre-consumer waste, or the garment might be a combination, and I showed them a picture of a skirt made from recycled wool and brand new fleece. Fifty percent of the Baby Boomers said that the totally recycled garment was their favorite and the most exciting. Forty percent preferred the pre-consumer fabric because it was newer and they felt it was in better condition. They felt like they were getting something new and they might pay more because it was newer materials. When we discussed the option of having new fabric and old fabric mixed together, their main comment was that it was nice to have something clean and new. This takes me back to our original discussion where some of the women were wearing family hand-me-downs. It would appear that family clothes are considered clean and non-family clothes are not.

Seventy-five percent of the Gen X group said that they would wear just the totally recycled textiles made into upcycled garments. The women did pick a favorite, but fifty percent did say they would support all three combinations. One of the women pointed out that the new fabric mixed in with recycled is not a good idea because the cause is important in this particular choice. “If you're going to choose recycled,” she said, “then choose all recycled.” Twenty-five percent of this group said they would pay more for pre-consumer textiles used in upcycled garments although they had an expectation for the garment to be comparable in price.

The Millennials were asked the same question about a favorite choice among the three options of textile composition. Once again, this group was not consistent in terms of answers. A third of them said they would wear an entirely recycled garment, 25% of them said pre-consumer fabric, and 25% said new and used combined was a favorite. One of the subjects said the composition does not matter, but she would prefer old to new because it has more of a story, yet when she added new garments to it, she would have more confidence in quality. There was some

confliction from many of them. They would pay more for pre-consumer fabric because they felt like it would flow better and look less pieced. Some also said any other choice than all recycled was not supporting the cause.

I observed some evolution in thinking when it came to the recycled options. All of the generational groups spoke about attractiveness being a top priority, and their first criteria for their choosing an upcycled garment was, “if I liked it and it suits my personality.” Some of the women would especially support local secondhand textiles being used even over brand. This was in direct conflict with earlier preferences about brand. Their own story about recycling, shopping and fashion was changing during the interview.

Almost all the women said that they would expect to shop for these upcycled fashions in boutiques. Many of them are concerned about convenience and said they would not necessarily go out of their way to a boutique to make a purchase. The second answer was specialty store, or high-end department stores like Nordstrom. They would not expect to find upcycled garments at a mass merchandiser such as JCPenney or discount store. One Boomer said “it would take away the specialness.” This is in contrast to the democratic thinking of the Millennials. “If it's available to the masses it loses credibility,” says this Boomer. Once again, the Millennials had the most confusion about where these clothes belong on the retail ladder. Their first choice answers were evenly split between boutiques and chain stores such as Anthropologie, Free People and Urban Outfitters because they liked the slightly alternative feel. They said the chain would be great because they could reach out to a larger audience. The second choice was high-end stores such as Nordstrom and Bloomingdales. They pretty much agreed that Target would not work as an option because that would mean that the clothes were mass-produced and they would lose that special quality under these circumstances. Another said they would love it if Target or JCPenney carried upcycled clothes but they would still worry if they would clean it properly.

One Millennial woman was very irritated when she thought about the retail situation. She felt these products would be sold in higher-end stores and that would mean that only the rich could buy recycled clothes, “as in, how ridiculous,” she said. All of the generational groups expressed that they may not shop the recycling cause over need or convenience so they may not ever see upcycled clothes. Those who shop in mid-range departments stores regularly said they would like these clothes to be there, but wouldn't expect to see them in those types of stores.

About half of the women felt like recycled upcycled clothing should be mixed in with other merchandise in the store. This is one of those questions that caused some rethought, and a few began to back away from their initial answer to mix it all in and said, “Wait a minute; this is a good standalone product” and “The story brings an attraction.” Some said if this trend is about fashion, then why wouldn't it be mixed in as a fashion choice? The separation would only be important if someone is shopping for the recycling cause. One of the Millennials said, “It's like purchasing two different things, and I want to know.”

There was a lot of conversation about the fact that these upcycled fashions are one of a kind. I added the question about shopping for these upcycled fashions online. One of the biggest concerns was fit and consistency because of differing fabrication. Several respondents questioned, “How would you know they really fit unless you try them on?” Some women said that they don't buy anything they can't try on. The Boomer group said they would not buy online unless the return policy was really good and if they had some confidence with the retailer. The younger group was more apt to buy something online because of reviews or measurements that were posted online by the manufacturer of upcycled clothing. Many also said that since these are one-of-a-kind garments, they considered this a different kind of shopping and would need to see quality in person.

There were some that said they never buy online anyway, and others were unsure about this particular situation, as it would need good customer service and a good return policy. Another was



worried about small companies that might be producing upcycled goods online and using low class photography. This would mean that she would need to see what the details were like in person. One woman said online shopping for upcycled fashion would be a bad situation and would give recycling a bad name. It would be better to see it in person and know how it feels.

If I gave these women a list of stores that carry this upcycled merchandise, would they go to the store and would they purchase? Boomers were the ones that had a hard time with this question. They were fascinated with the idea, but they would not necessarily go anywhere just to find the clothes. They could not give me a definite yes beyond 30%. There is a time issue here as the boutique is an extra stop and they would have to go out of their way. The Generation X respondents were about the same. The Millennials however, overwhelmingly said yes. Some of the subjects added that they have awareness now and can say yes. Only one would absolutely not go out of her way, and so if the upcycled clothes were in a Banana Republic, then fine, she would try them on but she wouldn't go looking for them.

Several Millennial women knew about the Urban Renewal line at Urban Outfitters. One woman complained about these clothes as clothing for hipsters. I asked her to define hipster. She said, "someone who tries to be cool, trendy, and vintage but is not genuine, and is like a mannequin. All of the hipsters copy each other," she said. The context here is that although it appears they are still wearing one-of-a-kind, she can "spot the hipster uniform." She does not count them as recycling for the cause.

Maybe wearing upcycled clothes that are identifiable also identifies a person as having a particular environmental philosophy. If a person does not have that philosophy, could she still wear it? In this case, she could be an environmentalist, a hipster or even an indie. Maybe a person could be one, or all three. If the recycling cause isn't part of the mix, does the person look disingenuous? Most

of the respondents put the fashion criteria first as a purchase priority. What if women wore upcycled garments only for their fashion value? How would that be viewed by the “cause-sters”?

Is it okay to not just be wearing one-of-a-kind, but be wearing something that maybe no one else is wearing? Exclusivity is associated with one of a kind fashion, especially designer fashion. It often means that the item was not mass-produced or uses fabrics, details, or styling that is singular to that garment. A garment can still be on trend but be one of a kind. If a woman wears something that no one else is wearing, that would mean that this is an independent style, something very new, very personal, or fashion that is seen as art and is unlike anything available. A dress that no one else is wearing would most likely fall into both categories; be one of a kind and be something no one else is wearing. Upcycled fashion would most likely be one of a kind as the recycled textiles are only available in very small quantities. Upcycled fashion can become fashion that no one else is wearing if a dress becomes art or is pieced in an unusual way because of the textiles used.

As a group, there were many professionals who tended to be conservative and noted that they could probably only wear upcycled accessories. They want to be polished and different, and this would give them the opportunity to do that in the workplace. They said they can be wild with accessories. About half of the total women said that they could be as expressive as they want. One woman said, “I want a dress to make a statement about who I am, how I live and what I value, and that’s a lot for a recycled piece to live up to.” Most were not afraid of wearing one-of-a-kind but were more afraid of wearing a trend or style that no one else was wearing. Most would prefer that these upcycled fashions fall under an established trend, but they would venture out for interesting accessories. One woman said that it is on the weekends that she can veer from her standard attire and then she can do whatever she wants. She loves this upcycling idea because it takes too much time to express your creativity so she likes it when clothes already express it for her. She believes that there will be upcycled, creative clothing that can do that. Some of the women can and will take the risks.

One of the most unique ideas about clothing that came from this interview was about the meaning involved with what we wear. These women began to understand that the meaning behind these upcycled clothes was about the many lives of one dress. For example, who originally made it, bought it, where did they wear it, and how was it resurrected? It also has meaning about this philosophy that we need to save our resources so that what we wear now will affect the future. One woman ended her interview with a statement that expressed how she felt about fashion and the multitude of meanings we discussed. She said, “I would be honored to wear upcycled clothes.”

## DISCUSSION / CONCLUSIONS

Some of the emerging ideas that came from this study were not common to traditional retail situations. Upcycled fashion can address more than one social cause at the same time; saving natural resources and ethical treatment of animals, global labor issues and environmental pollutants. Fashion can have special meaning relating to the genealogy of its textiles including where it came from and who wore it before. Both of these ideas can be a motivator for consumers to purchase as well as the innate nature of an upcycled garment. These fashions are usually one of a kind, pieced combinations and that multi-fabric, multi-cut, multi-media approach under the skillful creative eye of a designer can make these pieces look like art. The labels can become the storyboard that communicates not just leaning and some idea of content, but a narrative about the history the tale, the legend of the garment.

There were also unusual associations between fashion products and purchases. The idea that fashion and how it fits a woman's style and personality as well as price, comes before any social or environmental cause in terms of making a fashion purchase. Women are concerned about what brands have been pieced together to make an upcycled dress and those brands are still, even after they have been cut up or deconstructed, an indicator of the quality of the garment. Women believe that they have discharged their recycling responsibility to save the earth by donating and do not feel accountable to close the loop by making a purchase. The criteria for lovely styles and beautiful fit are always first. Recycling was not necessarily a standalone benefit when it comes to a purchase choice between post-consumer or pre-consumer textiles used in upcycled clothes, or those reclaimed textiles used in combination with new textiles. Secondhand textiles from unusual sources not typically used in fashion (i.e. expired parachutes) have an appeal for both conversational value, and the uniqueness

and may increase the desire to purchase and may influence consumers to pay more. Global upcycled fashion was also appealing and seemed to cancel out any loyalty to the U.S. in terms of sourcing.

Resistance or interest, or excitement about upcycling fashion also was a criterion for identifying emerging ideas. One of the strongest resistance factors for upcycled fashion was the concern for germs, insects and disease. The subjects said they would depend on the retailer to assure that the garments had been cleaned properly but they would want to know how they were cleaned for reassurance. Pricing opinions were conflicted as women recognized added value, processing steps, artistic nature and unique meaning may warrant a higher price yet felt upcycled fashion should be democratic and available to all. The artistic value did cause excitement as did meaning and both factors would cause women to pay more. There was definite interest in upcycled fashion and that interest grew as they learned terminology, options, more about the cause behind it and their access to it.

This study brought 20 women into a brief classroom about upcycling fashion where they participated with their views, but they also learned terms and techniques, and viewed examples. That learning was necessary in order to get their opinions because many women have never heard of this genre of clothing. Although some women had actually purchased some sort of upcycled fashion item, they did not associate this purchase with the cause of recycling or fashion. In fact, they seemed to associate recycling textiles with the current trashion trend or crafting. Trashion is the use of items that are considered trash (plastic wrap, bags, egg cartons etc.) and turning them into clothing or accessories. Crafting today refers to an activity where items are made by hand, but the impression is that there is great variance in skill and often little regard for attention to current trends. Neither of those ideas is complementary to fashion. One woman received a pair of mittens made from sweaters as a gift. When we talked about the word upcycling, she realized that her mittens were an example of that concept, but she viewed those mittens as a unique craft item. Another woman bought a purse

made out of plastic bags, an example of trashion. She really felt that was the extent of the fashion products involved with the cause of recycling. Only one woman had purchased a real example, a military jacket deconstructed and reconstructed into a junior fashion item from Urban Outfitter's Urban Renewal line. During our conversation, she pulled the jacket so that she could actually read the tag as she didn't know what it said. The tag read "Urban Renewal, recycled, made in the U.S., from vintage fabrics, dry-clean." She thought about this garment as a unique military jacket from Urban Outfitters that was on sale, something that none of her friends had. There really wasn't a second thought about the cause of recycling. In other words, these pieces were bought for their novelty.

Most of the women in the study made it clear that any upcycled garment purchase was all about fashion and price. The cause of recycling was really secondary. Novelty was still in play. They were intrigued that clothing might have a story that might involve its previous use, the locale it came from, and even the role that it plays in saving the earth. Europe is far ahead of us in this learning curve as theirs is real fashion activism in the cause of recycling, upcycling, and its relationship to the art of fashion. Many of the companies that were presented in the pictures as an example for the interview were from Europe, although I did consciously try to include some that had been manufactured in the U.S.

As a result of the questions about recycling and upcycling, we also learned about shopping habits and how they might relate. Discarded fashion is handled in a variety of ways and women honestly believe that they've done their duty to the recycling cause if they have recycled by donating. The reality is that donating benefits them. They might ask for a receipt to use as a tax credit. They might give away to their friends. Through recycling, it appears as though women are in the process of redefining the store model. The thrift store for example, is used to find jeans that are broken in so that they don't have to do it themselves or bear the suffering of doing it. They prefer to donate to thrift stores who have a drive up, because they don't have time to go in. Those that shop at thrift

stores prefer to go to ones that are merchandised, that have displays, and that have events like high tea and fashion shows, and a sale every Thursday. The consignment store is expected to have the services the department stores used to have, the best brands, salespeople they have a relationship with who call them when something special comes in or hold merchandise for them. The salespeople remember their sizes and let them in on the real secrets of a bargain. They are talking about a bargain on someone else's discards in fact, their recycling efforts. The subjects also like the return policy of the thrift stores and consignment stores. One woman told me, "If I don't like it or if it doesn't fit, I resell it back, or re-donate it." It's a simple return process and one that doesn't involve losing much money or time. So is our recycling duty done when we cast off our stuff? If clothes still have value and we sell them and others rebuy them again, where does that leave upcycling?

The word upscale and upcycled are cousins according to the women in these interviews. They recognized the process for upcycled fashion is laborious, a mixed media production that ends up a lot like art. Art costs money and so these are recycled one-of-a-kind pieces will have a higher value because of their uniqueness. The subjects were conflicted about price for upcycled fashion. There was recognition that there might be more processing to deconstruct and reconstruct, more piecing and as a result more seams. There might be unusual fabrications used, and the physical collection of those fabrics alone may be expensive. And yet these are used goods, this is secondhand fabric. Every generational groups felt that these garments should cost less and yet they were learning that the uniqueness of these garments may make them cost more than comparable garments. The Baby Boomers were more accepting of this as there was great appreciation for the artistic value in upcycled fashion.

## **Fashion democracy**

It was some of the Millennials that strongly felt that upcycled fashion should be available to everyone, affordable to the masses. Since recycling is everyone's responsibility, then shouldn't the products made from them be affordable for everyone? What they were describing without realizing it was the democracy of fashion. Fast fashion has that same philosophy. Should upcycled fashion be democratic, and how do we accomplish that?

So many questions about these interviews are unresolved in the minds of the participants. What kind of quality will they get in upcycled garments? If it's made out of high end brands, can we see the labels still on the garment? Can they list the brands on the tag? Most women said this would make them feel better and give them confidence about quality. Three of the Millennials discussed what might be happening with the high prices of upcycled fashion. One said that she understands the trickledown theory of fashion. It will start with the wealthy who can afford something new and eventually will make its way to the masses. She accepted the pricing because of that understanding. The fact that celebrities are wearing these garments was an irritant, especially for two Millennials. One of them expressed that when celebrities get involved in a cause or trend, it increases the popularity and the price. She pointed out examples like juicing. She said she had been juicing all her life, but as soon as celebrities started choosing it, it became big business with expensive juicers. She said celebrities try to look good to the public and act like they're saving the earth. As a result, she says, upcycled fashion will be more expensive. It made her mad.

## **Made on the earth**

We've all heard the campaign about buying products from the USA. This study made me see the pulse of a new wave of fashion globalism. These women got excited that some of these textiles for upcycled fashion might come from other countries. That adds to the uniqueness, the



conversational value, even the beauty. Upcycled garments were made on the earth, and they were saving the earth. They liked the idea that the garments could still be made in the USA, and they would want that on the label, but the specific locale, the genealogy of the textiles, would give an upcycled garment meaning. The “meaning” was an important word in the context of upcycled fashion. In a world where fast fashion gives clothing little meaning, subjects were intrigued by the idea that fashion might have a story, that we might know the genealogy of that dress. The Boomers were more concerned about purchasing locally and that upcycled fashion that uses textiles from their locale or a locale they had been to would have meaning at some point in their life. “I would be more apt to buy it if they are from my neck of the woods,” as one woman put it. It was exciting to find out that the story, the meaning, the locale, might be on the tag of the piece of merchandise. One woman said there might be too much of a story and that she would actually want a link to go to and learn more. Many of the women said that they would tell others about the story of their clothing and would feel good about fashion made this way.

### **No germs**

The cleaning of recycled fabrics that would become upcycled goods was also an important topic explored in this study. A majority of the women were concerned about their clothes being sanitized. There was concern about germs, about bed bugs, about disease. There are certain items of clothing they felt might carry germs more than others: hats, swimwear, shoes, undergarments. Those were items that were off the list across the board. There was a lot of discussion about cleaning. Some said washing was enough, and others wondered about freezing or steaming. Some discussed dry cleaning without giving a second thought to the fact that toxic chemicals might be reintroduced. Some knew about eco dry cleaning. That seemed to satisfy them.

It should be noted here that there are ways to make sure that secondhand textiles are clean and sanitized as well as ways to take care of insects. The women did suggest some ways they knew to clean secondhand clothes but were unsure of the processes. Washing and drying do take care of much of the problem. Bleach can be added to items that are bleachable and the rest can benefit from vinegar or Borax additives to the wash. Insects are typically killed at 120 degrees and most dryers can accommodate that temperature. Even dry cleanable clothes can sometimes be put in the dryer. Standard dry cleaning can take care of most cleaning issues, even insects, as the chemicals kill the bugs. Eco dry cleaning is still new, not available in many areas and this author is not clear whether those processes kill germs or bugs. A few women mentioned freezing which will kill bugs, however the length of time and freezer capacities may make this a difficult process to use. It is important that marketers will have to be clear about the cleaning process used for upcycled clothes so that consumers feel safe.

When we discussed topical design ideas that could add value to upcycled garments, ideas like printing, some women also expressed the fact that we were introducing more chemicals, introducing extra processing that negated the whole idea of recycling. There was no time in this study to talk about natural dyes, etc., but it would be a point that marketing would need to address. When we talked about recycling niche fabrics, leather, for example, only one woman mentioned the fact that we were saving animals. These consumers have not thought through the idea of the cause of recycling. No one talked about future generations, and no one talked about the poor that are using some of our discards. It was surprising that these topics were not in the conversation. There are lots of causes that would be intertwined in the idea of upcycling. Fewer animals would be killed for leather. If we used organic fabrics as the recycled fabrics to upcycle, there would be double benefit in that we could cut down on pollutants and third world labor issues. One woman here and one woman there pointed these out, but these were single minor issues discovered during these interviews. It was kind of an

“aha” moment that we could conquer more than one thing with upcycled fashion, even address more than one cause.

The professional women pointed out the pieced, bohemian, alternative nature that comes with using a collage of fabrics to make fashion. The women pointed out that these techniques might be too funky and “out there” for their traditional day jobs. However, they hoped that there might be upcycled fashion accessories developed that would have the same traits that were appealing in terms of story, meaning, and cause. Every woman appreciated the one of a kind nature and artistic flair that upcycled fashion can offer.

### **The fashion mix**

Most could not connect mass production to upcycling and were turned off by the fact that a store like Target might even consider carrying these clothes. The garments would lose their uniqueness so many of them said. They were concerned about access to recycled fashion and that they might have a hard time finding it. Would they recognize it even if they did see it in the marketplace? About half of them said that upcycled fashion should be mixed in with regular fashion. The other half wanted it separated; they wanted to know when shopping that there might be a difference in quality, cleanliness, and origin of what they might buy. In their mind, upcycled clothes are not the same and they should be treated differently.

The idea that a designer concept could be brought down to a non-designer item was also a difficult topic to quickly digest. These upcycled garments are one of a kind by nature, and there are differences in construction and fabrication when compared to a typical garment. The idea that they could have something really special that no one else has was difficult to grasp. That means that a person could be wearing something that no one else is wearing, and that means that a person may have to be adventurous in her fashion choices if she chooses upcycled garments. That means that her

money can buy something as special as a one-of-a kind. That means that you have to own it when you wear it, she must have confidence in her fashion choice that is so different from the person next to her. Will people around her recognize that these are secondhand, recycled, upcycled goods? Is there status in that because of this stewardship in the cause of recycling? Or is there a hobo mentality? Are these garments just trumped-up, dirty, old clothes or designer, upscaled real fashion with vintage fabrics? A real dichotomy existed here as we talked through these issues and discussed words like vintage and recycled, discards and secondhand, pre-consumer and post-consumer.

### **Cause and style**

The choice of a preference between a totally recycled garment, a garment that was made wholly from pre-consumer textiles, and the combination of both new and recycled textiles, was a hard choice as I think they were deciding in terms of what would bring the best value. There was some indecision on the matter. I think the options could have been framed under more than one context to get better answers. Subjects said that the cause was secondary and style is first. If the fashion is good, these consumers will buy it. The cause at this point is a nice bonus; it adds value. If it expresses their creativity, how they live and their values, then they will buy it. Recycling, the idea of reusing and saving the earth, is a value that is still in the formation process. It is not a standalone benefit as far as fashion is concerned, but it definitely will propel some consumers to purchase.

The fashion industry and its marketing efforts still needs to help women understand why they need to purchase recycled garments. If we discard and donate, what is the point if no one rebuys? Upcycling is not a trend; it is fashion movement. If we are to be successful with recycling, then upcycled fashion in some form has to be represented in all of our wardrobes. An awareness of the cause and the meaning are essential. Marketing, public service announcements, incentive programs and even celebrity fashion placement will help women to understand the possibilities.

Domina and Koch, (1989) classified recyclers into four groups, the non-recycler, the environmental recycler, the economic recycler and the charity recycler, as discussed earlier. I submit that a new group will need to form: maybe the fashion rerun recycler. The profile for this recycler will include a gatekeeper for heirlooms in the recycling marketplace. They want to recycle to provide quality garments for upcycling and they are fashion leaders. These recyclers want control over who has their discards and what they will do with them. They understand meaning behind clothes, and although this is an environmental stewardship, this is also a fashion stewardship. They will be activists in keeping artistic fashion excitement alive through the upcycling process. The other groups Domina and Koch (1989) identified were acting mostly out of economic self-interest and/or altruism. We have already learned through this study that the cause of saving the earth's resources is not the primary goal of recycling for many. This fashion rerun group is about heritage and future, a preservation of art and an avenue for a constant flow of new trends through upcycling. The re-invention, the re-fashioning, the cause of saving the earth's fashion resources will be the goal. We can save the earth one resource at a time. We all should be so honored to be in such a group of women.

### **Where to go from here**

This study was designed to accomplish the following goals:

1. Investigate discarding habits and perceptions about recycling textiles.
2. Understand shopping habits as they relate to both firsthand and secondhand fashion to explore attitudes about pre-worn clothing.
3. Explore fashion upcycling awareness.
4. Capture emerging ideas about how upcycled garments can be designed and merchandised so that people will buy them.

This research used a generational perspective, but future studies may want to use personality types as well. Larger studies on this topic might use focus groups as the synergistic effect may be beneficial. The stigma of wearing secondhand clothes may need some further research as well as the relationship of general home recycling as compared to textile/clothing recycling habits.

The implications for designers, manufacturers and retailers are huge. This study looks at emerging ideas and brings forward many ideas for future study. Designers must consider their image and name as associated with secondhand fabrics and how consumers will view their creations. Manufacturers must discuss labeling and what happens when their brand name is used in conjunction with others to make an upcycled piece. Designers and manufacturers need to consider how to make these upcycled garments constantly current and fashion-forward while piecing together fabrics of the past. Retailers must consider how to communicate the story behind the garments and the benefit of the cause and handle fit specifications, and returns and questions about quality. Consumers will need reassurance from everyone.

The research goal was to complete 20 comprehensive interviews in which women were willing to address my questions as thoroughly as possible. It was determined in advance that if I find someone who just was not interested in fashion, dress, appearance, or shopping, I would find another person who was interested in those areas. I found only two women who were willing but did not meet the criteria.

When I began the study, I did not know the extent to which women may be aware of the upcycled fashion choices, so I was prepared to take some time to educate them in terms of terminology and fashion choices. Although I considered whether the women I interviewed were fashion leaders or fashion followers, the differences in their opinions are intended to be as random as any shopper in a store, no matter their position of leadership on trends. That variable may make a difference in acceptance of the recycling options, but I do not view these options as a trend, but

rather a movement or a permanent fashion direction. The environmental cause is not something that may be important to fashion early adopters, and the fashion aspect may not be important to environmental activists. This way, I could look at a group of women with different priorities to get new ideas. Another idea for further study would be to take the consumer profiles from the Diffusion of Innovations framework and interview them separately.

Robinson explains that the Diffusion of Innovation theory does not involve persuasion for people to change but focuses on the fact that the product evolves (2009). In this case, we have both needs that have to be met. It is a necessity that we persuade people to close the recycling loop. Environmentalists say our planet depends on it. Claudio (2007) discusses the huge textile excess that is creating environmental waste. Upcycling of textiles in some form is essential. People must be educated and persuaded. We also have this fashion product, this upcycled garment that we want to be current and trendy and exciting. That product can evolve. Rogers theory of Diffusion of Innovations (2003), tells us that fashion with a cause needs relative advantage. Through studies like this, we as designers, manufacturers and retailers can create fashion that fulfills our stewardship and delights consumers.

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## **APPENDIX A: ORAL SCRIPT FOR PARTICIPANT CONSENT**

Hi, my name is Gail Myers. I am a graduate student in the department of Apparel, Design, and Hospitality Mgt. at North Dakota State University. I am conducting a research project to look at recycling in the fashion industry and ways to help designers and retailers make fashion more sustainable and hopefully more appealing to consumers. Would you like to hear more about our study?

[If yes,]

You are invited to participate in this research study. The only criteria for participating in the study is that you must be 25-65 years of age and that you shop for your own clothes. Your participation is entirely voluntary, and you may change your mind or quit participating at any time, with no penalty; however, your assistance would be greatly appreciated in making this a meaningful study.

If you decide to participate, we will set up a time for a phone interview. The interview should take about 20 minutes to complete, and I will ask questions about your feelings on recycled clothing in the marketplace and how it relates to your shopping habits and preferences. I may email you some pictures of clothing in advance so that you can comment on them during the interview. When writing about the study, your information will be combined with information from other people taking part in the study. If your ideas are singled out or quoted, you will not be identified. You will not be identified in any way in these written materials. We may publish the results of the study; however, we will keep your name and other identifying information private.

Feel free to ask any questions about the study now, or contact me later at 218-281-1870 or at [gail.myers@ndsu.edu](mailto:gail.myers@ndsu.edu). You may also contact my advisor, Dr. Ann Braaten at 701-231-7367. If you have questions about the rights of human participants in research, or to report a complaint about the

research, contact the NDSU Human Research Protection Program, at (701) 231.8908, or [ndsu.irb@ndsu.edu](mailto:ndsu.irb@ndsu.edu).

Thank you for your participation in this study. If you wish to receive a copy of the research results, please email me at [gail.myers@ndsu.edu](mailto:gail.myers@ndsu.edu) or call me at 218-281-1870.

## APPENDIX B: E-MAIL SURVEY QUESTIONS

The following survey will help us learn about you and your shopping habits before we move on to the interview portion of the research.

ENTER YOUR PERSONAL SURVEY NUMBER\_\_\_\_\_

1. When were you born?

- 1949-1965 (Baby Boomers)
- 1966-1976 (Generation X)
- 1977-1989 (Millennials)

2. What is your highest level of education?

- High school (grades through 12)
- Undergraduate (Associate's, Bachelor's)
- Graduate/Post graduate (Master's, PHD)

3. What category most characterizes your present work or career?

- Homemaker
- Service/Sales
- Manufacturing
- Professional
- Other

4. Do you recycle at home?

- Yes
- No

5. What items do you recycle? Recycling can include reusing, donating, or reselling. (Check all that apply).

- Plastics/ Glass
- Paper/Magazines/ Cardboard
- Textiles/Clothing
- Electronics/ Household/Appliances
- Wood/Metal
- Yard waste/ Food waste
- None

6. How often do you recycle ? (Check whichever statement applies.)

- I try to recycle everything I discard.
- I recycle as often as I can.
- I recycle only when it's convenient.
- Recycling does not fit into my lifestyle.

7. How do you most often dispose of unwanted clothing? (Check up to three)

- Trash
- Yard or garage sale
- Consignment store where you get a percentage of the sale
- Take it to a thrift store or deposit in charity clothing bins
- Sell it yourself on a website: eBay, craigslist, Facebook/blog, or an ad in media
- Give it away or trade with friends and family



8. Do you sew, mend, or repair clothing using a sewing machine?

- Yes
- No

9. How much money do you spend on clothing for yourself each month?

- \$0-\$50
- \$51-\$150
- \$151-\$250
- \$251--\$500
- \$501-\$1,000
- \$1,000 +
- I don't know, I don't keep track. I buy what I want.

10. Which of the traditional retail stores below do you **most often** shop for fashion? (Check up to three)

- Discounters like Target, K-Mart, or Wal-Mart
- Outlet stores like T.J.Maxx, Nordstrom Rack, or Ralph Lauren Factory Outlet
- Chain stores like Gap, Anthropologie, or New York & Company
- Mid-range department stores like Macy's, JCPenney, Kohl's
- High end department stores like Nordstrom, Bloomingdales, or Neiman Marcus
- Boutiques that are locally or independently owned like "Wink" or Sherry's Boutique or "Flirt"
- Designer label shops like Chanel, Versace or Valentino

11. Do you also buy any recycled clothing from (check all that apply):

- Yard or garage sales
- Consignment stores

- Thrift stores
- Websites like eBay, craigslist, Facebook/blog , or from an ad in media where individuals sell their clothing
- None

12. If you buy recycled clothing, do you look for (check all that apply):

- Any secondhand clothing that fits your wardrobe
- Vintage clothes (original clothes from a specific era)
- Quality brand name clothing
- Specialty clothing (wedding gowns, prom dress, etc.)

13. Which statement best describes your fashion sense?

- I dress for convenience, buy basics, and am not concerned with trends.
- I buy the newest trends I see on celebrities and in magazines.
- I wait to see what my friends and co-workers are wearing before I try something new.
- I am experimental with fashion and make my own trends.
- I am insecure about fashion and don't know what to buy or what looks good on me, so I depend on the advice of someone else: spouse, friend, or family member.

14. The following statement best describes my closet:

- My closet is organized and full of current clothes I wear and love.
- My closet is overflowing with clothing that is outdated and ill-fitting.
- My closet is full, but I wear most of it.
- My closet is average as it changes constantly as I shop and purge.
- My closet is sparse and basic.

- My closet is filled with clothes that have meaning or that I like, and it's hard to get rid of them.
- Other (please describe)\_\_\_\_\_

## **APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR EVERY PARTICIPANT**

1. Tell me the reasons that you get rid of clothes. How often do you purge your wardrobe?
2. Tell me about your experience shopping at thrift stores, consignment shops, and other clothing resale stores such as Once Upon a Child or Plato's Closet.
3. Does it ever bother you to wear pre-worn clothes?
4. How important is a recognizable brand or designer name in your apparel purchase, from a regular store or from a thrift store, consignment shop or other clothing re-seller?
5.
  - a. When shopping for apparel in a regular store, if the word "vintage" is used on the tag or label, how do you feel about that apparel? (Would you wear something labeled as "vintage"? What do you think "vintage" means? Would you buy a "vintage" item at a regular apparel store?)
  - b. When shopping for apparel in a regular store, if the word "recycled" is used on the tag or label, how do you feel about that apparel? (Would you wear something labeled as "recycled"? What do you think "recycled" means? Would you buy "recycled" clothing at a regular apparel store?)
6. If secondhand clothes were deconstructed and made into new current designs, would you consider a purchase? Would you purchase this garment if this garment had greater value and a higher price?
7. If only name brand clothes were collected, reconstructed, and made into new clothes, would you consider a purchase?
8. If only certain types of fabrics were collected, such as leather, wool from men's suits, and dressy fabrics from prom dresses, were deconstructed and made into new clothes, would you consider a purchase?

9. Clothing that has been deconstructed and made into new clothing is referred to as “upcycled” clothing. How would you expect upcycled clothes to be cleaned, labeled, and priced?
10. Where would you shop for upcycled fashion? What stores would you expect to carry it?
11. If I gave you a list of stores that are carrying upcycled fashion today, would you consider a purchase of an upcycled fashion item? Why or why not?
12.     a. When you see on the tag on a new dress that it says, “made from recycled post-consumer material,” does it make you more or less likely to buy, and why?
- b. When you see the tag on a new dress that states, “pre-consumer material,” does it make you more or less likely to buy, and why?
- c. When you see the tag of a new dress that states, “new and reclaimed materials as a combination,” does it make you more or less likely to buy, and why?
13. When you are at your job or with your circle of friends, how much self-expression and creativity in your clothing is acceptable?

### **Interview Questions with Possible Follow-up**

1. Tell me the reasons that you get rid of clothes. How often do you purge your wardrobe?
- Follow-up if needed:
- Do you most often trade, give away, or resell your clothes?
2. Tell me about your experience shopping at thrift stores, consignment shops, and other clothing resale stores such as Once Upon a Child or Plato’s closet.
- Follow-up:
- Do you buy specific brands so that you can easily resell your clothes?
  - What kind of person would buy your discarded clothes?

3. Does it ever bother you to wear pre-worn clothes?
4. How important is a recognizable brand or designer name in your apparel purchase, from a regular store or from a thrift store, consignment shop or other clothing re-seller?

Follow-up if needed:

- What does the brand name or designer name communicate to you?
  - Quality? Fit? Value?
5.
    - a. When shopping for apparel in a regular store, if the word “vintage” is used on the tag or label, how do you feel about that apparel? (Would you wear something labeled as “vintage”? What do you think “vintage” means? Would you buy a “vintage” item at a regular apparel store?)
    - b. When shopping for apparel in a regular store, if the word “recycled” is used on the tag or label, how do you feel about that apparel? (Would you wear something labeled as “recycled”? What do you think “recycled” means? Would you buy “recycled” clothing at a regular apparel store?)
  6. If secondhand clothes were deconstructed and made into new current designs, would you consider a purchase? Would you purchase this garment if this garment had greater value and a higher price?

Follow-up:

- Would you wear a garment like this that no one else is wearing?
- Would you wear a one-of-a-kind?

7. If only name brand clothes were collected, reconstructed and made into new clothes, would you consider a purchase (Differentiate by previous answers—designer labels, moderate chain labels etc.)?

Follow-up:

- Do you want to know the genealogy of your clothes?

8. If only certain types of fabrics were collected, such as leather, wool from men's suits, and dressy fabrics from prom dresses, were deconstructed and made into new clothes, would you consider a purchase?

Follow up:

- If only unusual, secondhand textiles were used—parachutes, military uniforms, kimonos?
- If the secondhand clothes were changed in some way—printed on, laser cut, etc.?
- Is a piece of fabric taken from a recycled or vintage brand name dress in very good condition still quality fabric that you have confidence in? (Keep in mind that fast fashion is only often worn just three times).

9. Clothing that has been deconstructed and made into new clothing is referred to as “upcycled” clothing. How would you expect upcycled clothes to be cleaned, labeled, and priced?

- Would you expect the price to be higher or lower than other garments you might find at certain stores?

10. a. When you see the tag on a new dress that states, “made from recycled post-consumer material,” are you more or less likely to buy, and why?
- b. When you see on the tag on a new dress that it says, “pre-consumer material,” are you more or less likely to buy, and why?

- c. When you see on the tag of a new dress that it says, “new and reclaimed materials as a combination,” are you more or less likely to buy, why?

11. Where would you shop for upcycled fashion? What stores would you expect to carry it?

Follow-up

- Would you be more inclined to buy an upcycled garment if you were shopping at certain stores that you trust? (JC Penney, Target, Nordstrom, Bloomingdale’s etc.- suggest stores in line with previous answers on the online survey)
- Should recycled clothes be mixed in with new clothes?
- Have you ever purchased recycled clothing from a name brand store?

12. If I gave you a list of stores that are carrying upcycled fashion today, would you consider a purchase of an upcycled fashion item? Why or why not?

Follow-up:

- Do you care if the fashions you buy are made from recycled materials or not?

13. When you are at your job, or with your circle of friends, how much self-expression and creativity in your clothing is acceptable?

Follow-up:

- How important is it to be wearing something that no one else is wearing, a one of a kind (without worrying about cost)?



## APPENDIX D: PICTURE BANK EXAMPLES FOR INTERVIEWS

1. Trench shirt. Mixed vintage Japanese tie-dyed silks (see Fig. D1).

Adapted from Asiatica (n.d.). Retrieved from

<http://www.asiaticakc.com/?p=1933>

Asiatica is a company with their own store in Kansas City who designs and makes clothing from vintage Japanese kimono. They have many high end stylish designs incorporating adaptive reuse of these rare and beautiful Japanese silks. They travel to Japan twice a year to select fabrics to upcycle. This trench shirt retails for \$1450.



Figure D1. Trench Shirt

2. Vintage Flowers Shoelaces. Repurposed vintage cotton sheets (see Fig. D2).

Adapted from Emzys Emporium (n.d.). Retrieved from

<http://www.etsy.com/listing/164281013/vintage-flowers-repurposed-fabric>

Emzys Emporium makes these handmade upcycled shoelaces from vintage floral sheets in several sizes to be sold on etsy. They use other vintage linens to make children's clothes. The shoelaces retail for \$8.

<http://www.etsy.com/listing/164281013/vintage-flowers-repurposed-fabric>



Figure D2. Shoelaces

3. Deja Skirt. Skirt front made from recycled wool trousers, sides are new stretch ponte knit (see Fig. D3).

Adapted from Preloved(n.d.). Retrieved from

[http://www.preloved.ca/shop/index.php?main\\_page=product\\_info&products\\_id=359](http://www.preloved.ca/shop/index.php?main_page=product_info&products_id=359)

Preloved uses vintage fabrics to make one of a kind fashion. They are located in Canada and recently closed their stores (one in Australia, two in Canada and a pop-up store there) to concentrate on their wholesale business and boutique website. Currently they manufacture upcycled women's and children's clothing and a new home furnishings accessories line for over 400 stores. Last season they made sweaters for Anthropologie stores in the U.S. using reclaimed Canadian wool sweaters. This skirt combines new ponte knit and recycled wool trousers and other similar skirts offer a center of leather or a wool sweater. Celebrities shop this upcycled brand including Julia Roberts, Kate Hudson, and Anne Hathaway. Their designs sometimes combine old and new fabrics in the same garment. Their designs typically retail between \$100-\$200 and this skirt retailed for \$149.



Figure D3. Skirt

4. Dress. Made from repurposed men's suits and pre-consumer wools (see Fig. D4).

Adapted from Junky Styling (n.d.). Retrieved from

<http://junkystyling.blogspot.com/>

Junky Styling in London, has been featured in Vogue magazine and is known for their innovative designs that are typically made from high quality second hand men's suits that they transform into women's fashions. The company makes sure that no two garments are the same-they may be made from the same pattern but the reclaimed fabrics are always different. Sources for their recycled textiles may be wools from suits in thrift stores or pre-consumer wools from men's suit factories. They published a book called "Junky Styling -Wardrobe Surgery" and often do custom upcycling or wardrobe surgery on intermittent visits to the U.S. You can bring in a few of your old wool coats and they will make them into a current style just for you. Their designs are very artistic and have appeared in art exhibitions all over the world and are in the permanent collection at the Design Museum in London.



Figure D4. Dress

5. Sweater. Made from a recycled mans' sweater (see Fig. D5).

Adapted from by sophie b. (n.d.). Retrieved from

<http://www.bysophieb.com/2013/01/winter-13-refashioning-of-mans-sweater.html>

Sophie B. considers herself a refashion ecodesigner with locations is Caen and Normandie, France. She sells clothes from her blog and she also supplies information about how she constructs her designs, sometimes complete with cutting instructions in case someone wants to try it. She participates in many French fashion shows and events to promote her upcycled fashion line. Many of her designs are a reconstruct of the original garment into a more current fashion with nothing added.



Refashioning of a man's sweater (L or XL).

Figure D5. Sweater

6. Sari Scarf. Made from upcycled vintage saris (see Fig. D6).

Adapted from Uncommongoods (n.d.). Retrieved from

<http://www.uncommongoods.com/product/sari-scarf>

Uncommongoods is a retailer that carries some upcycled accessories. This scarf is made in India where company representatives go door to door to barter for vintage saris. The saris are cut into strips and sewn together to give each scarf a different appearance. Small holes and frays in the scarves are mended by hand. They are wet and wrapped around bamboo poles to dry for added texture. The scarf retails for \$48.



Figure D6. Sari Scarf

7. Reclaimed t-shirt scarf. Made from unused reclaimed cotton t-shirt scraps (see Fig. D7).

Adapted from Uncommongoods (n.d.). Retrieved from

<http://www.uncommongoods.com/product/reclaimed-t-shirt-scarf>

Uncommongoods is a retailer that carries some upcycled accessories. Aspiro makes these scarves in Green Bay, Wisconsin and cognitively disabled adults helped to make them. This scarf is made from pre-consumer t-shirt scraps collected from apparel factories. These scarves include fabrics that has been topically printed. These scarves may share identical patterns and fabrics as left-over pre-consumer textile quantities allow for more of a mass production approach. The t-shirt scarf retails for \$24.



Figure D7. T-Shirt Scarf